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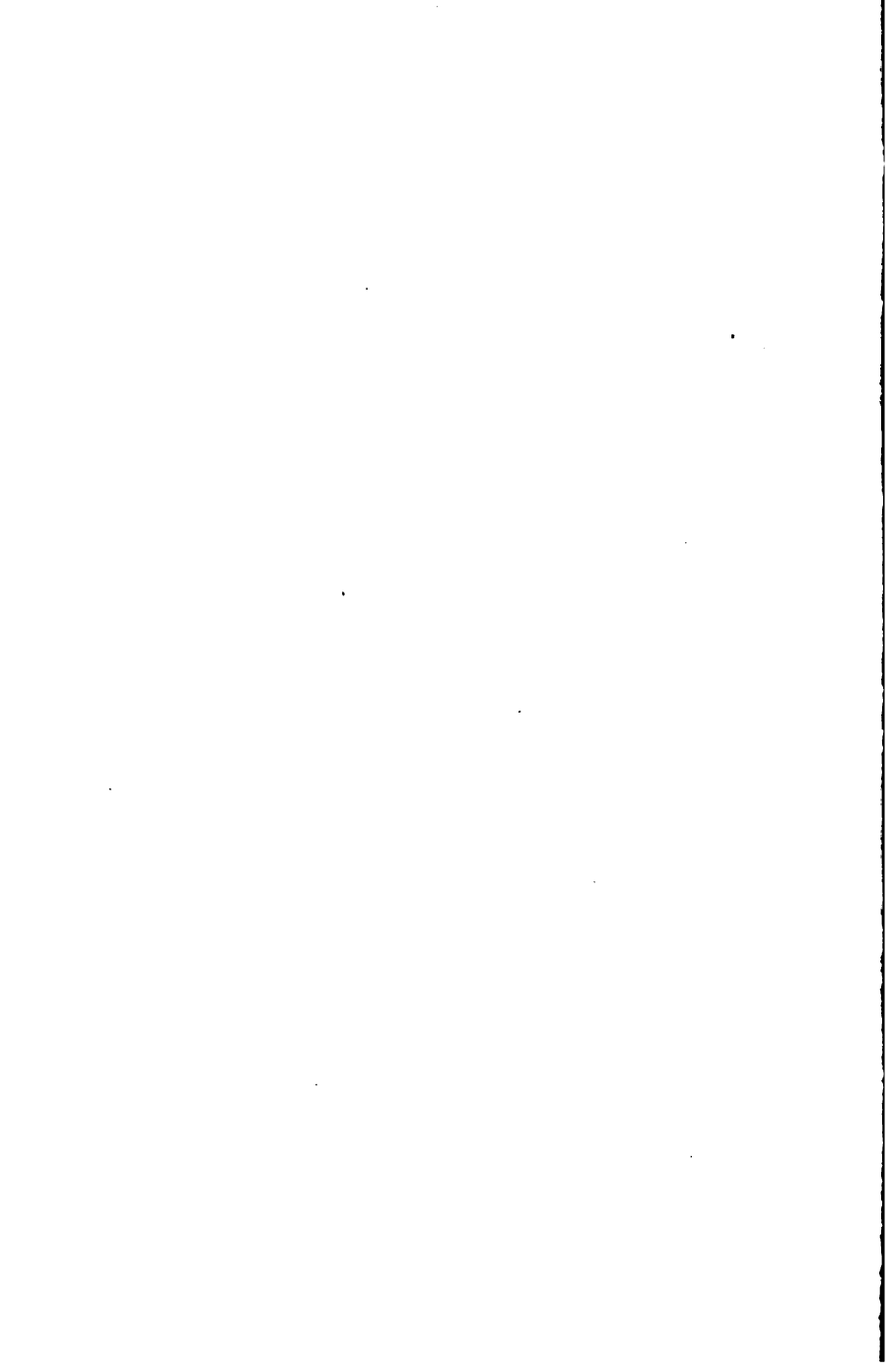
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The Serio-Comic Governess

BY

I. ZANGWILL

ILLUSTRATED BY SCENES FROM THE PLAY

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

PRICE FIFTY CENTS



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THE SERIO-COMIC GOVERNESS

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THE GREY WIG

STORIES AND NOVELETTES

By I. ZANGWILL

AUTHOR OF "CHILDREN OF THE GHETTO," ETC.



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THE WOMAN-BEATER
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THE BIG BOW MYSTERY
MERELY MARY ANN
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NELLY O'NEILL, THE "SERIO-COMIC."

Frontispiece.

THE SERIO-COMIC GOVERNESS

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✓
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"THE GREY WIG," ETC., ETC.

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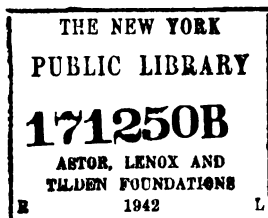
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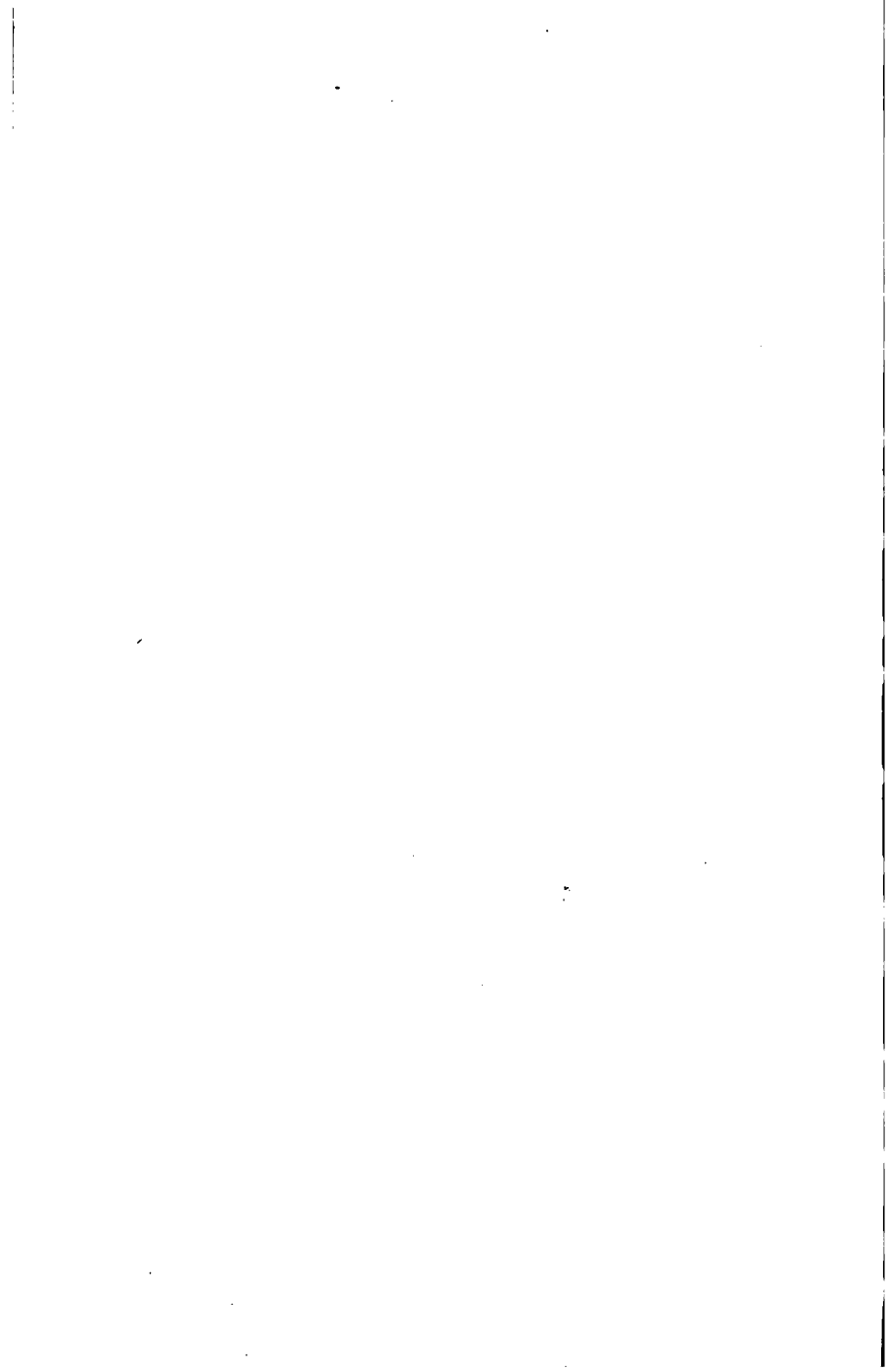
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THE SERIO-COMIC GOVERNESS

I

NELLY O'NEILL had her day in those earlier and quieter reaches of the Victorian era when the privilege of microscopic biography was reserved for the great and the criminal classes, and when the Bohemian celebrity (who is perhaps a cross between the two) was permitted to pass — like a magic-lantern slide — from obscurity to oblivion through an illuminated moment.

Thus even her real name has not hitherto leaked out, and to this day the O'Keeffes are unaware of their relative's reputation and believe their one connection with the stage to be a dubious and undesirable consanguinity with O'Keeffe, the actor and fertile farce-writer whose *Wild Oats* made a sensation at Covent Garden at the end of the eighteenth century. To her many brothers and sisters, Eileen was just the baby, and always remained so, even in the eyes of the eminent civil engineer who was only her senior by a year. Among the peasantry — subtly prescient of her freakish destinies — she was dubbed "a fairy child": which was by no means a compliment. A bad uncanny creature for all the

colleen's winsome looks. The later London whispers of a royal origin had a travestied germ of truth in her father's legendary descent from Brian Boru. He himself seemed scarcely less legendary, this highly coloured squire of the old Irish school, surviving into the Victorian era, like a Georgian caricature; still inhabiting a turreted castle romantically out of repair, infested with ragged parasites: still believing in high living and deep drinking: still receiving the reverence if not the rent of a feudal tenantry, and the affection of a horsey and bibulous countryside. When in liquor there was nothing the O'Keeffe might not do except pay off his mortgages. "He looked like an elephant when he put his trousers on wrong — you know elephants have their knees the wrong way," Eileen once told the public in a patter-song. She did not tell the public it was her father, but like a true artist she learned in suffering what she taught in song. One of her childish memories was to be stood in a row of brothers and sisters against a background of antlers, fishing-rods, and racing prints, and solemnly sworn at for innumerability by a ruddy-faced giant in a slovenly surtout. "Bad luck to ye, ye gomerals, make up your minds whether ye're nine or eleven," he would say. "A man ought to know the size of his family: Mother in heaven, I never thought mine was half so large!" These attempts to take a census of his children generally occurred after a peasant had brought him up the

drive—"hat in one hand, and Squire in the other," as the patter-song had it. At the moment of assisted entry his paternal dignity was always at its stateliest, and it was not till he had gravely hung his cocked hat upon an imaginary door-peg in the middle of the hall and seen it flop floorward that he lost his calm. "Blood and 'ouns, ye've the door taken away again."

Sometimes—though this was scarcely a relief—another befuddled gentleman would be left at the uninhabited lodge in his stead. That was chiefly after hunt dinners or card and claret parties, when a new coachman would take a quartet of gentry home, all clouded as to their identities. "Arrah now! they've got themselves mixed! let thim sort themselves." And the coachman would grab at the nearest limb, extricate it and its belongings from the tangle, and prop the total mass against the first gate he passed. And so with the rest.

Eileen's mother, who was as remarkable for her microscopic piety as for the beauty untarnished by a copious maternity, figured in the child's memories as a stout saint who moved with a rustle of silken skirts and heaved an opulent black silk bosom relieved by a silver cross.

"Who are you?" her spouse would inquire with an oath.

"It's your wife I am, Bagenal dear," she would reply cheerfully. For she had grown up in the four-

bottle tradition, and intoxication appeared as natural for the superior sex as sleep. Both were temporary phases, and did not prevent men from being the best of husbands and creatures when clear. And when the marketwomen or the beggarwomen respectfully inquired of her, "How is your good provider?" she made her reply with no sense of irony, though she had been long paying the piper herself. And the piper figured literally in the household accounts, as well as the fiddler, for the O'Keeffe was what the mud cabins called a "ginthleman to the backbone."

II

Family tradition necessitated that Eileen should at least complete her education at a convent in the outskirts of Paris, and her first communion was delayed till she should "make" it in that more pious atmosphere. The O'Keeffe convoyed her across the two Channels, and took the opportunity of visiting a "variety" theatre in Montmartre, where he was delighted to find John Bull and his inelegant women-kind so faithfully delineated. So exhilarated was he by this excellent take-off and a few *bocks* on the Boulevard, that he refused to get down from the omnibus at its terminus.

"*Jamais je ne descendrai, jamais,*" he vociferated. Eileen was, however, spared the sight of this miniature French revolution. She was lying sleepless in the strange new dormitory, watching the nun walk-

ing up and down in the dim weird room reading her breviary, now lost in deep shadow with the remoter beds, now lucidly outlined in purple dress with creamy cross as she came under the central night-light. Eileen wondered how she could see to read, and if she were not just posing picturesquely, but from the fervency with which she occasionally kissed the crucifix hanging to the rosary at her side Eileen concluded she must know the office by heart. Her own Irish home seemed on another planet, and her turret-bedroom was already far more shadowy than this: presently both were swallowed up into nothingness.

She commenced her convent career characteristically enough by making a sensation. For on rising in the morning she felt ineffably feeble and forlorn; she seemed to have scarcely closed her eyes, when she must be up and doing. The tiny hand-basin scarcely held enough water to cool her brow, still giddy from the sea-passage; to do her hair she had to borrow a minute hand-glass from her neighbour, and when after early mass in the chapel she found other prayers postponing breakfast, she fainted most alarmingly and dramatically. She was restored and refreshed with balm-mint water, but it took some days to reconcile her to the rigid life. To some aspects of it, indeed, she was never reconciled. The atmosphere of suspicious supervision was asphyxiating, after the disorderliness and warm humanity of her Irish

home, after the run of the stables and the kennels, and the freedom of the village, after the chats with the pedlars and the beggars, and the borrowing and blowing of the postman's bugle, after the queenship of a host of barefooted gossoons, her loyal messenger-boys. Now her mere direct glance under reproof was considered "*hardi*." "Droop your eyes, you bold child," said the shocked Madame Agathe. A fancy she took to a French girl was checked. "*On défend les amitiés particulières*," she was told to her astonishment. But on this one point Eileen was recalcitrant. She would even walk with her arm in Marcelle's, and somehow her will prevailed. Perhaps Eileen was trusted as a foreigner: perhaps Marcelle, being a day-boarder, weighed less upon the convent's conscience. There came a time when even their desks adjoined and were not put asunder. For by this time *Madame La Supérieure* herself, at the monthly reading of the marks, had often beamed upon Eileen. The *maitresse de classe* had permitted her to kiss her crucifix, and the music-mistress was enchanted with her skill upon the piano and her rich contralto voice, such a godsend for the choir. In her very first term she was allowed to run up to the dormitory for something, unescorted by an *Enfant de Marie*. "Ascend, my child," said Madame Agathe, smiling sweetly, for Eileen had outstripped all her classmates that morning in geography, and Eileen, with a prim "*Oui, ma mère*," rose and sailed

with drooping eyelashes to the other end of the schoolroom, and courtesied herself out of the door, knowing herself the focus of envy and humorously conscious of her goodness. She had learned to love this soothing sensation of goodness, as she sat in her blue pelerine on a hard tabouret before her desk, her hands folded in front of her, her little feet demurely crossed. The sweeping courtesy of entrance and exit dramatised this pleasant sense of virtue. Later her aspirant's ribbon painted it in purple.

She worked hard for her examinations. "*Elle est si sage, cet enfant,*" she heard Madame Ursule say to Madame Hortense, and she had a delicious sense of overwork. But she was not always *sage*. Once when her school desk was ransacked in her absence — one of the many forms of espionage — she refused to rearrange its tumbled contents, and when she was given a bad mark for disorder, she cried defiantly, "It is Madame Rosaline who deserves that bad mark." And the pleasure of seeing herself as rebel and phrasemaker was no less keen than the pleasure of goodness.

One other institution found her regularly rebellious, and that was the pious reading which came punctually at half-past eight every morning. She was bored by all the holy heroines who seemed to have taken vows of celibacy at the age of four. "Devil take them all," she thought whimsically one

morning. "But I dare say these good little people have no more reality than our 'little good people' who dance reels with the dead on November Eve. I wish Dan O'Leary had taught them all to shake their feet," and at the picture of jiggling little saints Eileen nearly gave herself away by a peal of laughter. For she had learned to conceal her unshared contempt for the holy heroines, and found a compensating pleasure in the sense of amused superiority, and the secret duality which it gave to her consciousness. She even went so far as to ransack the library for these beatific biographies, and when she found herself rewarded for "diligent reading" her amusement was at its apogee. And thus, when the first awe and interest of the strange life receded, Eileen was left standing apart as on a little rock, criticising, satirising, and even circulating verses among the few cronies who were not sneaks. The dowerless "sisters" who scrubbed the floors, the portioned *Mesdames*, with their more dignified humility, the Refectory readers, the Father Confessors, the little *Enfants de Jésus*, the big *Enfants de Marie*, who sometimes owed their blue ribbon to their birth or their money rather than to their exemplary behaviour, all had their humours, and all figured in Eileen's French couplets. The difficulty of passing these from hand to hand only made the reading — and the writing — the spicier. Literature did not interfere with lessons, for Eileen composed not during "prepa-

ration," but while she sat embroidering handkerchiefs, as demure as a sleeping kitten.

When the kitten was not thus occupied, she was playing with skeins of logic and getting herself terribly tangled.

She put her difficulties to her favourite nun as they walked in the quaint arcades of the lovely old garden, and their talk was punctuated by the flippant click of croquet-balls in the courtyard beyond.

"Madame Agathe is pleased with me to-day," said Eileen. "To-morrow she will be displeased. But how can I help the colour of my soul any more than the colour of my hair?"

"Hush, my child; if you talk like that you will lose your faith. Nobody is pleased or vexed with anybody for the colour of their hair."

"Yes, where I come from a peasant girl suffers a little for having red hair. Also a man with a hump, he cannot marry unless he owns many pigs."

"Eileen! Who has put such dreadful thoughts into your head?"

"That is what I ask myself, *ma mère*. Many things are done to me and I sit in the centre looking on, like the weathercock on our castle at home, who sees himself turning this way and that way and can only creak."

"A weathercock is dead — you are alive."

"Not at night, *ma mère*. At home in my bedroom I used to put out my candle every night by clapping

the extinguisher upon it. Who is it puts the extinguisher upon me?"

The good sister almost wished it could be she. But she replied gently, "It is God who gives us sleep — we can't be always awake."

"Then I am not responsible for my dreams anyhow?"

"I hope you don't have bad dreams," said the nun, affrighted.

"Oh, I dream — what do I not dream? Sometimes I fly — oh, so high, and all the people look up at me, they marvel. But I laugh and kiss my hand to them down there."

"Well, there's no harm in flying," said the nun. "The angels fly."

"Oh, but I am not always an angel in my dreams. Is it God who sends these bad dreams, too?"

"No — that is the devil."

"Then it is sometimes he who puts the extinguisher on?"

"That is when you have not said your prayers properly."

Eileen opened wide eyes of protest. "Oh, but, dear mother, I always say my prayers properly."

"You think so? That is already a sin in you — the sin of spiritual pride."

"But, *ma mère*, devil-dreams or angel-dreams — it is always the same in the morning. Every morning one finds oneself ready on the pillow, like a clock that has been wound up. One did not make the works."

"But one can keep them clean."

Eileen burst into a peal of laughter.

"*Qu'avez-vous donc ?*" said the good creature in vexation.

"I thought of a clock washing its face with its hands."

"You are a naughty child—one cannot talk seriously to you."

"Oh, dear mother, I am just as serious when I am laughing as when I am crying."

"My child, we must never cultivate the mocking spirit. Leave me. I am vexed with you."

As her first communion approached, however, all these simmerings of scepticism and revolt died down into the recommended *recueillement*. Her days of retreat, passed in holy exercises, were an ecstasy of absorption into the divine, and the pious readings began to assume a truer complexion as the experiences of sister-souls, deep crying unto deep. Oh, how she yearned to take the vows, to leave the trivial distracting life of the outer world for the peace of self-sacrificial love !

As she sat in the chapel, all white muslin and white veil, her hair braided under a little cap, the new rosary of amethyst—a gift from home—at her side, her hands clasped, exalted by incense and flowers and the sweet voices of the choir, chanting Gounod's Canticle, "*Le Ciel a visité la terre*," she felt that never more would she let this celestial visitant go.

When after the communion she pulled the last piece of veiling over her face, she felt that it was for ever between her and the crude world of sense; the "Hymn of Thanksgiving" was the apt expression of her emotions.

But next time she came under these æsthetic, devotional influences — even as her own voice was soaring heavenward in the choir — she thought to herself, "How delicious to have an emotion which you feel will last for ever and which you know won't!" And a gleam of amusement flitted over her rapt features.

III

When Eileen returned to the Convent after her first summer vacation in Ireland she was richer by a surreptitious correspondent. He wrote to her, care of Marcelle, who had a careless mother. He was a young officer from the neighbouring barracks who, invited to make merry with the hospitable O'Keeffe, had fallen a victim to Eileen's girlish charms and mature appearance, for Eileen carried herself as if her years were three more and her inches six higher. Her face had the winsome Irish sweetness; it, too, looked lovelier than a scientific survey would have determined. Her nose was straightish, her mouth small, her lashes were long and dark and conspired with her dark hair to trick a casual observer into thinking her eyes dark, but they were grey with little flecks of golden light if you looked closelier than you

should. Her hands were large but finely shaped, with long fingers somewhat turned back at the tips, and pretty pink nails—the hands were especially noticeable, because even when Eileen was not playing the pianoforte, she was prone to extend her thumb as though stretching an octave and to flick it as though striking a note.

It was not love-letters, though, that Lieutenant Doherty sent Eileen, for the schoolgirl had always taken him in a motherly way, and indeed signed herself “Your Mother-Confessor.” But the mystery and difficulty of smuggling the letters to and fro lent colour to the drab Convent days, far vider colour than the whilom passing of verses. So long as Marcelle’s desk remained next to Eileen’s it was comparatively easy—though still risky—while one’s head was studiously buried in “Greek roots,” for one’s automatic hand to pass or receive the letter beneath the desks through the dangerous space of daylight between the two. “Let not your right hand know what your left hand doeth,” Eileen once quoted when Marcelle’s conscience pricked. For Marcelle imagined an amour of the darkest dye, and could not understand Eileen’s calmness any more than Eileen could understand Marcelle’s romantic palpitations alternating with suggestive sniggerings.

But when Marcelle was at length separated from Eileen by a suspicious management, a much more breathless plan was necessary. For Marcelle would

deposit the Doherty letter in Eileen's compartment in the curtained row of little niches — where one kept one's work-bag, atlas, and other educational reserves — or Eileen would slip the reply into Marcelle's, and there it would lie, exposed to inspectorial ransacking, till such times as Eileen or Marcelle could transfer it to her bosom. Poor Marcelle lived with her heart in her mouth, trembling, at every rustle of the curtain, for her purple ribbon. However, luck favoured the bold, while the only bad moment in which Eileen was on the verge of detection she surmounted by a stroke of genius.

"What are you hiding there?" said the music-mistress, more sharply than she was wont to address her pet pupil. Eileen put her hand to her bosom. 'Twas as if she were protecting the young lieutenant from pursuing foes, and he became romantically dear to her in that perilous moment, pregnant with swift invention.

She looked round with dramatic mysteriousness. "Hush, *ma mère*," she breathed; "the Mother Superior might hear."

"Ah, it concerns the Reverend Mother's fête," cried the music-mistress, falling into the trap and even saving Eileen from the lie direct. "Good, my child," and she smiled tenderly upon her. For the birthday of the Lady Superior which was imminent was heralded by infinite mysteriousness. The Reverend Mother was taken by surprise, regularly and

punctually. The girls all subscribed, their parents were invited to send plants and flowers. The air vibrated with sublime secrecy, amid which the Reverend Mother walked guilelessly. And when the great day came and the fête was duly sprung upon her, and the pupils all dressed in white overwhelmed her with bouquets and courtesies, how exquisite was her pleased astonishment! That night talking was allowed in the Refectory, and how the girls jabbered! It was like the rolling of ceaseless thunder — one would have thought they had never talked before and never would talk again, and that they were anxious to unload themselves once for all.

"How the ordinary becomes the extraordinary by being forbidden," philosophised Eileen. "At the Castle I can do a hundred things, which here become enormous privileges, even if I am allowed to do them at all. Is it so with everything they say is wrong? Is all sin artificial, and do people sin so zestfully only because they are cramped? Or is there a residue of real wickedness?" Thus she thought, struggling against the obsession of an inquisitorial system which merely clouded her perceptions of real right and wrong. And alone she ate silently, a saintly figure amid the laughing, chattering crew.

She wrote her maternal admonitions to young Doherty during the preparation-time, and far keener than her sense of the lively, good-looking young officer was her sense of the double life she led

through him in this otherwise monotonous Convent. When she achieved the blue ribbon of the *Enfants de Marie*, for which she had worked with true devotion, it added poignancy to her pious pleasure to think that one false step in her secret life would have marred her overt life.

IV

As the end of her conventual period drew nigh Eileen resolved never to go back to the spotted world, but to ask her father to pay her dowry as Bride to the Church, and she had just placed in Marcelle's niche the letter informing Lieutenant Doherty of her call to the higher life (and pointing out how apter than ever his confessions would now be) when Marcelle's signal warned her to look in her own niche. There she found a letter which she could not read till bread-and-chocolate time, but which then took the flavour out of these refreshments. Her lover—he leaped to that verbal position in her thought in this moment of crisis—was ordered off in haste to Afghanistan. The geographical proficiency which had won her so many marks served her only too well, but she hastened to extract her atlas from the fatal niche, and to pore over her geographical misery. She felt she ought to withdraw her own letter for revision, but she could not get at Marcelle or even make her understand. In her perturbation she gave Cabul and Candahar as Kings of Navarre, and Mar-

celle, implacable as a pillar-box, went away in the evening like a mail-cart.

But the very same night the Superior handed Eileen an opened cablegram which banished Lieutenant Doherty much farther than Afghanistan. Her father was very ill, and called her to his bedside. Things had a way of happening simultaneously to Eileen, these coincidences dogged her life, so that she came to think of them as the rival threads of her life getting tangled at certain points and then going off separately again. After all, if you have several strings to your life, she told herself, it would be more improbable that they should always remain separate than that they should sometimes intertwine.

Eileen reached the Castle through a tossing avenue of villagers, weeping and blessing, and divined from their torment of sympathy that "his honour" was already in his grave. Poor feckless father, how she had loved him spite all his rollicking ways, or perhaps because of them. Through her tears she saw him counting — on his entry into Paradise — the children who had preceded him, and more than ever fuzzled by the flapping of their wings. Oh, poor dearest, how unhomely it would all be to him, this other world where his jovial laugh would shock the nun-like spirits, where there was no more claret, cold, mulled, or buttered, and no sound of horn or tally-ho.

Perhaps it was as well that so many of his brood had gone before him, for with his departure the

Castle fell metaphorically about the ears of the survivors. Creditors gave quarter no longer, and Mrs. O'Keeffe found herself reduced to a modest red-gabled farmhouse, with nothing saved from the crash save that part of her dowry which was invested in trustees for the education of her boys. There was no question of Eileen returning to the Convent as a pupil: her desire to take the veil failed at the thought that now she could only be a dowerless working-sister, not a teacher. And for teaching, especially music-teaching, she felt she had a real gift. By a natural transition arose the idea of becoming a music-teacher or a governess outside a Convent, and since her stay at home only helped to diminish her mother's resources, she resolved to augment them by leaving her. Family pride forbade the neighbourhood witnessing a deeper decline. The O'Keeffes were still "the Quality"; it would be better to seek her fortunes outside Ireland and retain her prestige at home. The dual existence would give relish and variety.

Eileen's mind worked so quickly that she communicated these ideas to her mother, ere that patient lady had quite realised that never more would she say, "It's your wife I am, Bagenal dear."

"No, no, you are not to be going away," cried Mrs. O'Keeffe, in alarm.

"Why wouldn't I?" asked Eileen.

Mrs. O'Keeffe could not tell, but looked mysterious



THIS IS SUCH A DELIGHTFUL PLACE FOR ME TO HIDE IN IF
ANYBODY COMES.

meanings. This excited Eileen, so that the poor woman had no rest till she answered plainly, "Because, mavourneen, it's married you are going to be, please the saints."

"Married! Me!"

"It was your father's dying wish, God keep his soul."

"But to whom?"

"You should be asking the priest how good he is. Didn't you notice that the chapel is being white-washed afresh and how clear the Angelus bell rings? Not that it matters much to him, for he has lashings of money as well as a heart of gold."

"Hasn't he a name, too?"

"Don't jump down my throat, Eileen darling. I shouldn't be thinking of O'Flanagan if your father —"

"O'Flanagan! Do you mean the man that bought our Castle at the auction?"

"And isn't it beautifully repaired he's having it for you? He saw you when you were home for the holidays, and he asked us for your hand, all so humble, but your father told him he must wait till you came home for good."

"O'Flanagan!" Eileen flicked him away with her thumb. "A half-mounted gentleman like that."

"Eileen aroon, beggars can't be choosers."

Eileen flushed all over her body. "No more can beggars on horseback."

"Your father will be sorry you take it like that, mavourneen." And the stout saint burst into tears.

Eileen winced. She could almost have flung her arms round her mother and promised to think of it. Suddenly she remembered Lieutenant Doherty. How dared they tear her away from the man she loved! They had not even consulted her. She flicked her thumb agitatedly on the back of her mother's chair. Let her weep! Did they want to sell her, to exchange her for a castle, as if she were a chess-piece? The thought made her smile again.

Her mother said no more, but she could not have employed a more convincing eloquence. The reticence wrought upon Eileen's nerves. After a couple of months of maternal meekness and family poverty, the suggested sacrifice began to appeal to her. A letter from Doherty on his steamer (forwarded to her from Paris by Marcelle), passionately protesting against her intention to take the vows, came to remind her that sacrifice was what she yearned for. The coming of the letter was providential, she told herself: if Marcelle had not posted hers against her will, she might not have had this monition. To return to the Castle as a bride, martyred for the family redemption, was really only a way of returning to the Convent. It meant a life of penance for the good of others. To think of her mother sunning herself again upon the battlemented terrace, or sleeping — if only as guest — in

the great panelled bedroom, brought a lump to her throat; her poor tenantry, too, should bless her name; she would glide among them like a spirit, very sad, yet with such healing in her smile and in her touch. "Sure the misthress is the swatest angel God iver sint, so she is." At home she would sit and spin in the old tapestried room, her own life as faded, and sometimes she would dream in the hall, among the antlers and beast-skins, and watch the great burning logs, so much more poetic than this peat smoke which hurt one's eyes. Ah, but then there was O'Flanagan. Well, he would not be much in the way. He liked riding over his new estate in his buckskin breeches, cracking his great loaded whip. She had met him herself once or twice, and the great shy creature had blushed furiously and ridden off down the first bridle-path. "I turn his horse's head as well as his," she had thought with a smile. Yes, she must sacrifice herself. How strange that the nuns should imagine you only renounced by giving up earthly life. Why, earthly life might be the most celestial renunciation of all. But Lieutenant Doherty, what of him? Had she the right to sacrifice him, too? But then she had never given him any claim upon her — she had been merely his little mother-confessor. If he had dared to love her — as his passionate protest against the veil seemed to suggest — it was at his own risk. Poor Doherty, how grieved he would be in far Afghanistan. He

would probably rush upon the assegais and die, murmuring her name. Her eyes filled with delicious tears. She sat down and scribbled him a letter hastily, announcing her impending marriage, and posted it at once, so as to put herself beyond temptation to draw back. Then she dashed to her mother's room and sobbed out, "Dear heart, I consent to be martyred."

"What?" said Mrs. O'Keeffe, opening her eyes.

"I consent to be married," Eileen corrected hastily.

"Do you mean to Mr. O'Flanagan?" Mrs. O'Keeffe's face became red as the sun in mist. The cross heaved convulsively on her black silk bosom.

"To whom else? You haven't forgotten he wanted to marry me."

"No, but *he* has, I am fearing."

"What?" It was now Eileen's turn to open her eyes, and the tears dried on her lashes as she listened. Mrs. O'Keeffe explained, amid the ebb and flow of burning blood, that she had waited in vain for Mr. O'Flanagan to renew his proposal. At first she thought he was waiting for a decent interval to elapse, or for the Castle to be ready for his bride, but gradually she had become convinced by his silence and by the way he avoided her eye when they met and turned his horse down the nearest boreen, that Eileen had been right in calling him half-mounted. He had proposed when he imagined the Squire's fortunes were as of yore, but now he feared he

would have to support the ruined family. Well, he needn't fear. The family wouldn't touch him with a forty-foot pole.

"If only your poor father had been alive," wound up Mrs. O'Keeffe, "the dirty upstart would never have dared to put such an insult on his orphaned daughter, that he wouldn't, and if Dan O'Leary should hear of it—which the saints forbid—it's not the jig that his foot would be teaching Mr. O'Flanagan."

The bathos of this anti-climax to martyrdom was too grotesque. Eileen burst into a peal of laughter, which was taken by her mother as a tribute to her lively vituperation. Decidedly, life was deliciously odd. Suddenly she remembered her posted letter to Doherty, and she laughed louder.

Should she send another on its heels? No, it would be rather difficult to explain. Besides, it would be so interesting to see how he replied.

V

Holly Hall—Eileen's first place—was in the English midlands, towards the North: a sombre stone house looking down on a small manufacturing town, whose very grass seemed dingied with coal-dust. "A dromedary town," Eileen dubbed it; for it consisted of a long level with two humps, standing in a bleak desert. On one of the humps she found herself perched. Below—between the humps—lay

the town proper, with its savour of grime and gain. The Black Hole was Eileen's name for this quarter; and indeed you might leave your hump, bathed in sunlight, dusty but still sunlight, and as you came down the old wagon-road you would plunge deeper and deeper into the yellowish fog which the poor townspeople mistook for daylight. The streets of the Black Hole bristled with public-houses, banks, factories, and dissenting chapels. The population was given over to dogs and football, and medical men abounded. Arches, blank walls, and hoardings were flamboyant with ugly stage-beauties, melodramatic tableaux, and the advertisements of tailors. After the Irish glens and the Convent garden the Black Hole was not exhilarating.

Mr. Maper, the proprietor of Holly Hall, was a mill-owner, a big-boned, kindly man, who derived his Catholicism from an Irish mother, and had therefore been pleased to find an Irish girl among the candidates for the post of companion to his wife.

As he drove her from the station up the steep old wagon-road he explained the situation, in more than one sense. Eileen's girlish intuition helped his lame sentences over the stiles. Briefly, she was to polish the quondam mill-hand, whom he had married when he, too, was a factory operative, but who had not been able to rise with him. He was an alderman and a J.P. That made things difficult enough. But how if he became Mayor? An alderman has no necessary

feminine, not even alderwoman, but Mayor makes Mayoress. And a Mayoress is not safe from the visits of royalty itself. Of course the Mayoress was not to suspect she was being refined; "made a Lady Mayoress," as Eileen put it to herself.

She entered with a light heart upon a task she soon found heavy. For the mistress of Holly Hall had no sense of imperfections. She was a tall and still good-looking person, and this added to her fatal complacency. Eileen saw that she imagined God made the woman and money the lady, and that between a female in a Paris bonnet and a female in a head-shawl there was a natural gap as between a crested cockatoo and a hedge-sparrow. Mrs. Maper indeed suffered badly from swelled self, for it had subconsciously expanded with its surroundings. The wide rooms of the Hall were her spacious skirts, bedecked with the long glitter of the glass-houses; her head reached the roof and wore the weathercock as a feather in her bonnet. All those whirring engines in the misty valley below were her demon-slaves, and the chimneys puffed up incense at her. When she drove out, her life-blood coursed pleasurably through the ramping, glossy horses.

Mrs. Maper, in short, saw herself an empress. It was simply impossible for her to realise that there were eyes which could still see the head-shawl, not the crown. Her one touch of dignity was grotesque—it consisted of extending her arm like a stiff sceptre,

in moments of emphasis, and literally pointing her remarks with her forefinger. Sometimes she pointed to the ceiling, sometimes to the carpet, sometimes to the walls. This digital punctuation appeared to be not only superfluous but irrelevant, for Heaven might be invoked from the floor.

With this bejewelled lady Eileen passed her days either on the Hump, or in the Black Hole, or in the environs, and but for her sense of humour and her power of leading a second life above or below her first, her tenure of the post would have been short. The most delicate repetitions of mispronounced words, the subtlest substitution of society phrases for factory idioms, fell blunted against an impenetrable ignorance and self-sufficiency. Short of dropping the pose of companion and boldly rapping a pupil on the knuckles, there seemed to her no way of modifying her mistress. "Who can refine what Fortune has gilded?" she asked herself in humorous despair. The appearance of Mr. Maper at dinner brought little relief. It was a strange meal in the lordly dining-room — three covers laid at one end of the long mahogany table, under the painted stare of somebody else's ancestors. Eileen's girlish enjoyment of the prodigal fare was spoiled by her furtive watch on the hostess's fork. Nor did the alderman contribute ease, for he was on pins lest the governess should reveal her true mission, and on needles lest his wife should reveal her true depths. Likewise he worried Eileen to drink his

choicest wines. Vintages that she felt her father would have poised on his tongue in mystic clucking ecstasy stood untasted in a regiment of little glasses at her elbow.

She repaid them, however, by adroit educational remarks.

"How stupid of me again!" she said once. "I held out my hock glass for the champagne! Do tell me again which is which, dear Mrs. Maper."

"I suppose you never had a drink of champagne in your life afore you come here," said Mrs. Maper, beamingly. And she indicated the port glass.

"No, no, Lucy, don't play pranks on a stranger," her husband put in tactfully. "It's this glass, Miss O'Keeffe."

"Oh, thank you!" Eileen gushed. "And this is what? Sherry?"

"No, port," replied Mr. Maper, scarcely able to repress a wink.

"You'll have to tell me again to-morrow night," said Eileen, enjoying her own comedy powers. "My poor father tried to teach me the difference between bird's-eye and shag, but I could never remember."

"Ah, Bob's the boy for teaching you that," guffawed the mill-owner. "I stick to half-crown cigars myself." His wife shot him a dignified rebuke, as though he were forgetting his station in undue familiarity.

Afterwards Eileen wondered who Bob was, but at

the moment she could think of nothing but the farcical complications arising from the idea of Mrs. Maper's providing Mr. Maper with a male companion secretly to improve *his* manners. Of course the *two* companions would fall in love with each other.

After dinner things usually woke up a little, for Eileen was made to play and even sing from the scores of "Madame Angot" and other recent comic operas — a form of music that had not hitherto come her way, though it was the only form the music-racks held to feed the grand piano with. Not till the worthy couple had retired, could she permit herself her old Irish airs, or the sonatas and sacred pieces of the Convent.

VI

Accident — the key to all great inventions — supplied Eileen with a new way of educating her mistress. The cook had been impertinent, Mrs. Maper complained. "Why don't you hunt her?" Eileen replied. Mrs. Maper corrected the Irishism by saying, "Do you mean dismiss?" Eileen hastened to accuse herself of Irish imperfections, and henceforward begged to learn the correct phrases or pronunciations. Sometimes she ventured apologetically to wonder if the Irish way was not more approved of the dictionary. Then they would wander into the library in the apparently unoccupied wing, and consult dictionary after dictionary till

Eileen hoped Mrs. Maper's brain had received an indelible impression.

One Sunday afternoon a friendly orthoepical difference of this nature arose even as Mrs. Maper sat in her palatial drawing-room waiting for callers, and they repaired to the library, Mrs. Maper arguing the point with loud good humour. A glass door giving by corkscrew iron steps on the garden, banged hurriedly as they made their chattering entry. The rows of books—that had gone with the Hall like the family portraits—stretched silently away, but amid the smell of leather and learning, Eileen's lively nostrils detected the whiff of the weed, and sure enough on the top of a step-ladder reposed a plain briar pipe beside an unclosed Greek folio.

"The scent is hot," she thought, touching the still warm bowl. "Bob seems as scared as a rabbit and as learned as an owl." Suddenly she had difficulty in repressing a laugh. What if Bob *were* the corresponding male companion!

"I see Mr. Robert has forgotten his pipe," she said audaciously.

Mrs. Maper was taken aback. "The — the boy is shy," she stammered.

What! Was there a son lying *perdu* in the house all this while? What fun! A son who did not even go to church or to his mother's receptions. But how had he managed to escape her? And why did nobody speak of him? Ah, of course, he was a

cripple, or facially disfigured, morbidly dreading society, living among his books. She had read of such things. Poor young man!

After dinner she found herself examining the family album inquisitively, but beyond a big-browed and quite undistorted baby nursing a kitten, there did not seem anything remotely potential, and she smiled at herself as she thought of the difficulty of evolving bibs into briar pipes and developing Greek folios out of kittens.

From Mrs. Maper's keenness about the University Boat Race as it drew near, and from her wearing on the day itself a dark blue gown trimmed profusely with ribbons of the same hue, Eileen divined that Bob was an Oxford man. This gave the invisible deformed a new touch of interest, but long ere this Eileen had found a much larger interest — the theatre.

She had never been to the play, and the Theatre Royal of the Black Hole was the scene of her induction into this enchantment. In those days the touring company system had not developed to its present complexity, and the theatre had been closed during the first month or so of Eileen's residence in Dromedary Town. But at length, to Mrs. Maper's delight, a company arrived with a melodrama, and as part of her duties, Eileen, no less excited over the new experience (which her Confessor had permitted her), drove with her mistress behind a pair of spanking steeds to the Wednesday *matinée*. Mrs. Maper

alleged her inability to leave her home-keeping husband as the cause of her daylight playgoing, but Eileen maliciously ascribed it to the pomp of the open carriage.

They occupied a box and Eileen was glad they did. For instead of undergoing the illusion of the drama, she found it killingly comic as soon as she understood that it was serious. It was all she could do to hide her amusement from her entranced companion, and somehow this box at the theatre reminded her of the Convent room in which she used to sit listening to the pious readings anent infant prodigies. One afternoon it came upon her that here Mrs. Maper had learned her strange pump-handle gestures. Here it was that ladies worked arms up and down and pointed denunciatory forefingers, albeit the direction had more reference to the sentiment.

It was not till a comic opera came along that Eileen was able to take the theatre seriously. Then she found some of the melodies of the drawing-room scores wedded to life and diverting action, sometimes even to poetic dancing; the first gleam of poetry the stage gave her. When these airs were lively, Mrs. Maper's feet beat time and Eileen lived in the fear that she would arise and prance in her box. It was an effervescence of joyous life—the factory girl recrudescent—and Eileen's hand would lie lightly on Mrs. Maper's shoulder, feeling like a lid over a kettle about to boil.

When they came home Eileen would gratify her mistress by imitations of comedians. Presently she ventured on the tragedians, without being seen through. She even raised her arm towards the ceiling or shot it towards the centre of the carpet pattern, and Mrs. Maper followed it spellbound.

But from all these monkey tricks she found relief in her real music. When she crooned the old Irish songs, the Black Hole was washed away as by the soft Irish rain, and the bogs stretched golden with furze-blossom and silver with fluffy fairy cotton, and at the doors of the straggling cabins overhung by the cloud-shadowed mountains, blue-cloaked women sat spinning, and her eyes filled with tears as though the peat smoke had got into them.

VII

In such a mood she was playing one Saturday evening in the interval before dinner, when she became aware that somebody was listening, and turning her head, she saw through the Irish mist a man's figure standing in the conservatory. The figure was vanishing when she cried out a whit huskily, "Oh, pray, don't let me drive you away."

He stood still. "If I am not interrupting your music," he murmured.

"Not at all," she said, breaking it off altogether.

As the mist cleared she had a vivid impression of a tall, fair young man against a background of palms.

"Eyes burning under a white marble mantel-piece," she summed up his face. Could this uncrippled, rather good-looking person be Bob?

"Won't you come in, Mr. Robert?" she said riskily.

"I only wished to thank you," he said, sliding a step or two into the room.

"There is nothing to thank me for," she said, whirling her stool to face him. "It's my way of amusing myself." She was glad she was in her evening frock.

"Amusing yourself!" He looked aghast.

"What else? I am alone — I have nothing better in the world to do."

"Does it amuse you?" He was flushed now, even the marble mantel-piece ruddied by the flame. "I wish it amused me."

Now it was Eileen's turn to gasp. "Then why do you listen?"

"I don't listen — I bury myself as far away as I can."

"So I have understood. Then what are you thanking me for?"

"For what you are doing for —" his hesitation was barely perceptible — "my mother."

"Oh!" Eileen looked blank. "I thought you meant for my music."

His face showed vast relief. "Oh, you were talking of your music! Of course, of course, how stupid

of me! That is what has drawn me from my hole, like a rat to the Pied Piper, and I do thank you most sincerely. But being drawn, what I most wished to thank the Piper for was — ”

“Your mother pays the Piper for that,” she broke in.

He smiled but tossed his head. “Money! what is that?”

“It is more than I deserve for mere companionship — pleasant drives and theatres.”

He did not accept her delicate reticence.

“But you have altered her wonderfully!” he cried.

“Oh, I have not,” she cried, doubly startled. “It’s just nothing that I have done — nothing.” Then she felt her modesty had put her foot in a bog-hole. Unseeing he helped her out.

“It is most kind of you to put it like that. But I see it in every movement, every word. She imitates you unconsciously — I became curious to see so excellent a model, though I had resolved not to meet you. No, no, please, don’t misunderstand.”

“I don’t,” she said mischievously. “You have now given me three reasons for seeing me. You need give me none for not seeing me.”

“But you must understand,” he said, colouring again, “how painful all this has been for me — ”

“Not seeing me?” she interpolated innocently.

“The — the whole thing,” he stammered.

"Yes, parents are tiresome," she said sympathetically.

He came nearer the music-stool.

"Are they not? They came down every year for the Eights."

"Is that at Oxford?"

"Yes."

She was silent; her thumb flicked at a note on the keyboard behind her.

"But that's not what I mind in them most —"

She wondered at the rapidity with which his shyness was passing into effusiveness. But then was she not the "Mother-Confessor"? Had not even her favourite nuns told her things about their early lives, even when there was no moral to be pointed? "They're very good-hearted," she murmured apologetically. "I'm often companion — in charity expeditions."

"It's easy to be good-hearted when you don't know what to do with your money. This place is full of such people. But I look in vain for the diviner impulse."

Eileen wondered if he were a Dissenter. But then "the place was full of such people."

"You don't think there's enough religion?" she murmured.

"There's certainly plenty of churches and chapels. But I find myself isolated here. You see, I'm a Socialist."

Eileen crossed herself instinctively.

"You don't believe in God!" she cried in horror. For the good nuns had taught her that "*les socialistes*" were synonymous with "*les athlès*."

He laughed. "Not, if by God you mean Mammon. I don't believe in Property — we up here in the sun and the others down there in the soot."

"But you *are* up here," said Eileen, naively.

"I can't help it. My mother would raise Cain." He smiled wistfully. "She couldn't bear to see a stranger helping father in the factory management."

"Then you *are* down there."

"Quite so. I work as hard as any one even if my labour isn't manual. I dress like an ordinary hand, too, though my mother doesn't know that, for I change at the office."

"But what good does that do?"

"It satisfies my conscience."

"And I suppose the men like it?"

"No, that's the strange part. They don't. And father only laughs. But one must persist. At Oxford I worked under Ruskin."

"Oh, you're an artist!"

"No, I didn't mean that part of Ruskin's work. His gospel of labour — we had a patch for digging."

"What — real spades!"

"Did you imagine we called a spoon a spade?" he said, a whit resentfully.

Eileen smiled. "No, but I can't imagine you using a common or garden spade."

"You are thinking of my hands." He looked at them, not without complacency, Eileen thought, as she herself wondered where he had got his long white fingers from. "But it is a couple of years ago," he explained. "It was hard work, I assure you."

"Did your mother know?" Eileen asked with a little whimsical look.

"Of course not. She would have been horrified."

"Well, but most people would be surprised."

"Yes. Put your muscle into an oar or a cricket bat and you are a hero; put your muscle into a spade and you are a madman."

"You think it's *vice versa*?" queried Eileen, ingenuously.

"Much more. At least," he stammered and coloured again, "I don't pose as a hero but simply —"

"As what?" Eileen still looked innocent.

"I simply think work is the noblest function of man," he burst forth. "Don't you?"

"I do not," answered Eileen. "Work is a curse. If the serpent had not tempted Eve to break God's commandment, we should still be basking in Paradise."

He looked at her curiously. "You believe that?"

"Isn't it in the Bible?" she answered, seriously astonished.

"Whatever the primitive Semitic allegorist may have thought, work is a blessing, not a curse."

"Then you *are* an atheist!" Eileen recoiled from this strange young man.

"Ah, you shrink back!" he said in tones of bitter pleasure. "I told you I lived in isolation."

Eileen's humour shot forth candidly. "You'll not be isolated when you die."

His bitterness passed into genial superiority. "You mean I'll go to hell. How can you believe anything so horrible?"

"Why is that horrible for me to believe? For you —" And she filled up the sentence with a smile.

"I don't believe you do believe it."

"There's nothing you seem to believe. I do honestly think that you can't be saved if you don't believe."

"I accept that. The question, however, is what kind of belief and what kind of saving. Do you suppose Plato is in hell?"

"I don't know. He invented Platonic love, didn't he? So that might save him." She looked at him with her great grey eyes — he couldn't tell whether she was quizzing him or not.

"Is that all you know of Plato?"

"I know he was a Greek philosopher. But I only learned Greek roots at the Convent. So Plato is Greek to me."



HOW DARE YOU BRING THAT THING HERE?

"He has been beautifully Englished by the Master of my College. I wish you'd read him."

"Is the translation in the library?"

"Of course — with lots of other interesting books, and such queer folios and quartos and first editions. The collector was a man of taste. Why do you never come and let me show them you?"

"You'd run away."

"No, I wouldn't," he smiled encouragingly.

"Yes, you would. And leave your pipe on Plato!"

He laughed. "Was I rude? But I didn't know you then. Come to-morrow afternoon and show you've forgiven me."

The new interest was sufficiently tempting. But her maidenliness held back. "I'll come with your mother."

Disgust lent him wit. "You're *her* companion — not she yours."

"True. Nor I yours."

"Then I'll come here."

"Bringing the Plato and the folios —?"

"Why not? You can't forbid me my own drawing-room."

"I can run away and leave my crochet-hook behind."

"You'll find me hooked on whenever you return."

"Well, if you're determined — by hook or by crook! But you're not going to convert me to Socialism?"

"I won't promise."

"You must. I don't mind reading Plato."

"He's worse. He isn't a Christian at all."

"I don't mind that. He's B.C. He couldn't help it. But you Socialists came after Christ."

"How do you know Socialism isn't a return to Him?"

"Is it?"

"Aha! You are getting interested. . . . But I hear my mother coming down to dinner. To be continued in our next. *À demain*, is it not?"

He held out his shapely white hand, and hastened through the conservatory into the garden.

"Going to dig?" Eileen called after him maliciously.

VIII

Eileen became interested in Robert Maper, for the old books he opened up to her were quite new and enlarging. She had imagined the Church replacing Paganism as light replaced darkness. Now she felt that it was only as gas replaced candle-light. The darkness was less Egyptian than the nuns insinuated. Plato in particular was a veritable chandelier. It occurred to her suddenly that he might be on the black list. But she was afraid to ask her Confessor for fear of hearing her doubt confirmed. To tell the good father of the semi-secret meetings in the library would have been superfluous, since there was nothing to conceal even from Mrs. Maper, though that lady

did not happen to know of them. Eileen did not even use the garden door. Besides, there was never a formal appointment, not infrequently, indeed, a disappointment, when the library held nothing but books. Robert Maper merely provided that possibility of an innocent double life, without which existence would have been too savourless for Eileen. Even a single line of railway always appeared dismal to her; she liked the great junctions with their bewildering intertanglements, their possibilities of collision. And now that Lieutenant Doherty had faded away into Afghanistan and silence—he did not even acknowledge the letter announcing her approaching marriage—Robert Maper proved a useful substitute.

One day Mr. Maper senior invited her to drive down with him and go over the factory, and as Mrs. Maper was not averse from impressing her employée by the sight of the other employés, she was permitted to go. Nothing, however, would induce Mrs. Maper to adventure herself in these scenes of her early life, touching which she professed a sovereign ignorance. "Machines are so clattery," she said. "My head wouldn't stand them. I once went to that exhibition in London and I said to myself, never no more for this gal."

"And you never did go *any* more since you were a *girl*?" asked the companion, with professional pointedness.

"No, never no more," replied Mrs. Maper, serenely,

"once is too often, as the gal said when the black man kissed her."

Eileen laughed dutifully at this quotation from the latest comic opera, and went off, delighted to companion the husband by way of change. He proved quite a new man, too, in his own element, bringing the most complicated machinery to the level of her understanding. Room after room they passed through, department after department full of tireless machinery, and tired men and women, who seemed slaves to the whims of fantastic iron monsters, all legs and arms and wheels. It took a morning to see everything, down to the pasting and drying and packing rooms, and as a last treat Mr. Maper took her to the engine-room, whence he said came the power that turned those myriad wheels, moved those myriad levers, in whatever department they might be and whatever their function. Eileen gazed long at the mighty engine, rapt in reverie. She could scarcely tear herself away, and when at last Mr. Maper brought her into the counting-house, she had forgotten that she must meet his son there. The white-browed clerk in corduroys did not, however, raise his eyes from his ledger, and Eileen was grateful to him for preserving the piquancy of their relation.

She did not find it so piquant, though, in the library next Sunday afternoon when he was clutching at her hand and asking her to be his wife. She

awoke as from a dream to the perception of a solemn and grotesque fact.

"Oh, please!" and she tried to tear her hand away.

He clung on desperately. "Eileen—don't say you don't care at all."

"I'm not Eileen, and I particularly dislike you at this moment. Let me have my hand, please."

He dropped it like a stinging nettle. "I was hoping you'd let me keep it," he murmured.

"Why?" She was simple and pitiless. "Because we read Plato together? That was platonic enough, wasn't it?"

"You can jest about what breaks my heart?"

"I am very sorry. I like you."

His breathing changed, "like a fish thrown back into the water," Eileen thought. She hastened to add, "But it's not what a wife should feel."

"How do you know what a wife should feel?"

Eileen screwed up her forehead. "If I felt it, I should know, I suppose."

"No, you mightn't. You've liked to come here and talk to me."

"Because I like books. And you talk like a book."

"That was before I fell in love. I didn't talk like a book just now."

"When you took my hand! More like a book than ever. I've read it all—lots of times."

"Oh, Eil — Miss O'Keeffe — you are very cruel."

Eileen smiled. "I am not — I'm very kind — I threw you back into the water."

He gasped, as though out of it again. "Do you mean I am not grown enough?"

She flushed and improvised on his theme. "Not quite that. You hooked yourself, as you threatened to do. But suppose I had landed you. You know the next step — hot water. What a lot you would have got into, too!"

"You are thinking of my mother?"

"Yes, raising Cain, I think you said once. Oh, dear, swim about and be thankful." And a vision of Mrs. Maper's amazement twitched the corners of her lips and made them more enchanting.

"I'm not so cold-blooded as all that. But if you do throw me back, let it be with the promise to take me again, when I *am* grown. I don't say it to tempt you, but you know I shall be very rich."

"Indigestible, do you mean?"

"Oh, please let us drop that metaphor! Metaphors can never go on all fours."

"Certainly not when they have fins."

"Don't jest, Eil — Miss O'Keeffe! Let me redeem you from your sordid life."

"Why is it sordid? You said work was divine."

"You can work in a higher sphere."

"And this is the Socialist! I really thought you'd want me to turn factory lass."

"You are laughing at me."

"I am perfectly serious. I won't drag you down from Socialism, and a head-shawl wouldn't become me."

"Why, you'd look sweet in it. Dear, dear, Miss O'Keeffe —"

"Good-by."

"No, you shan't go." He barred her way. Her airiness had given him new hope.

"If you don't behave sensibly, I'll go altogether — give notice."

"Then I'll follow you to your next place."

"No followers allowed. Seriously, I'll leave if you are foolish."

"Very well," he said abruptly. "Let's go on reading Plato," and he turned to the book.

"No, no more Dialogues, in or out of Plato."

She was smiling but stern. He opened the library door and bowed as she passed out.

"Remember," he said. "I will remain foolish for ever."

"You have too long an opinion of yourself," was Eileen's parting flash.

IX

The next evening she sat in the drawing-room before dinner, softly playing an accompaniment to her thoughts. Why didn't she feel anything about Robert Maper except a mild irritation at the destruc-

tion of so truly platonic a converse? In a book, of which his proposal savoured, she would have found him quite a romantic person. In the actuality she felt as frigid as if his marble forehead was chilling her, and what she remembered most acutely was his fishlike gasping. Then, too, the contradictoriness of his social attitude, his desire to make her a rich drone, his shame at his mother, his reclusive shyness — all the weaknesses of the man — came to obscure her sense of his literary idealism, if not, indeed, to reveal it as a mere coquetry with fine ideas and coarse clothes. And then for a moment the humour of being Mrs. Maper's daughter-in-law appealed to her, and she laughed to herself in soft duet with the music.

And in the middle of the duet Mrs. Maper herself burst in, with her bodice half hooked and her hair half done.

"What's this I hear, Miss Hirish Himpudence, of your goings-on with my son?"

Eileen swung round on her stool. "I beg your pardon," she said.

"Oh, you can't get out of it by beggin' my pardon, creepin' into the library like a mouse — and it's a nice sly mouse you are, too, but there's never a mouse without its cat —"

"She'd have done better to do your hair and mind her business," said Eileen, calmly.

Mrs. Maper's forefinger shot heavenwards. "It

was you as ought to have minded your business. I didn't pay you like a lady and feed you like a duchess to set your cap at your betters. But I told Mr. Maper what 'ud come of it if we let you heat with us, though I didn't dream what a sly little mouse — ”

The torrent went on and on. Eileen as in a daze watched the theatric forefinger—now pointed at the floor as if to the mouse-hole, now leaping ceiling-wards like the cat,—and her main feeling was professional. She was watching her pupil, storing up in her memory the mispronunciations and vulgarisms for later insinulative improvement. Only a tithe of her was aware of the impertinence. But suddenly she heard herself interrupting quietly.

“I shall not sleep under your roof another night.” Mrs. Maper paused so abruptly that her forefinger fell limp. She was not sure she meant to give her companion notice, and have the trouble of training another, and she certainly did not wish to be dismissed instead of dismissing.

“Silly chit!” she said in more conciliatory tones. “And where *will* you sleep?”

But Eileen now felt she must obey her own voice—the voice of her outraged pride, perhaps even of Brian Boru himself. “Good-by. I'll take some things in a handbag and send for my box in the morning.”

Mrs. Maper's hand pointed to the ceiling. “And

is that the way you treat a lady—you're no lady, I tell you that. I demand a month's notice or I shall summons you."

At this juncture it occurred to Eileen that this might have been her mother-in-law, and a smile danced into her eyes.

"Himpudent Hirish hussy! Oh, but I'll have the lore of you. Don't forget I'm the wife of a Justice of the Peace."

"Very well; you get Justice, I want Peace." And Eileen fled to her room.

She had hardly begun packing her handbag when she heard the door locked from the outside with a savage snap and a cry of, "I'll learn you who's mistress here, my lady."

Eileen smiled. She was only on the second floor, and captivity revived all her girlish prankishness. She now began to enjoy the whole episode. That she was out of place, out of character, out of lodging even, was nothing beside the humour of this incursion into real life of the melodrama she had mocked at. Was she not the innocent heroine entrapped by the villain? Fortunately, she would not need the hero to rescue her. She went on packing. When her handbag was ready she looked about for means to escape. She opened her windows and studied the drop and the odd bits of helpful rain-pipe. Descent was not so easy as she had imagined. Short of tearing the sheets into strips (and that

might really bring her within the J.P.'s purview) or of picking the lock (which seemed even more burglarious, not to mention more difficult) she might really remain trapped. However, there would be time to think properly when she had packed her big box. Half an hour passed cheerfully in the folding of dresses to an underplay of planned escapes, and she had just locked the box, when Mrs. Maper's voice pierced the door panel.

"Well, are you ready to come to supper?"

The governess's instinct corrected "dinner." Mrs. Maper when excited was always tripping into this betrayal of auld lang syne, but she preserved a disdainful silence.

"Eileen, why don't you hanse?"

Still silence. The key grated in the lock.

Eileen looked round desperately. The thought of meeting Mrs. Maper again was intolerable. The mirrored door of the rifled wardrobe stood ajar, revealing an enticing emptiness. Snatching up her handbag and her hat, she crept inside and closed the door noiselessly upon herself. "The wardrobe mouse," she thought, smiling.

"Well, my lady!" Mrs. Maper dashed through the door, in her dinner-gown and diamonds, her forefinger hovering, balanced, between earth and heaven. She saw nothing but an answering figure ribboned and jewelled, that dashed at her and pointed its forefinger menacingly.

The appearance of this figure as from behind the glass shut out from her mind the idea of another figure behind it. The packed box, neat and new-labelled, the absence of the handbag and of any sign of occupancy, the open windows, the silence, all told their lying tale.

"The Hirish witch!" she screamed.

She ran from one window to the other seeking for a sign of the escaped or the escapade. She was relieved to find no batter of brains and blood spoiling the green lawn. How had the trick been done? It did not even occur to her to look under the bed, so hypnotised was she by the sense of a flown bird. Eileen almost betrayed herself by giggling, as at the real stage melodrama.

When Mrs. Maper ran downstairs to interrogate the servants — eruption into the kitchen was one of her incurable habits — Eileen slipped through the wide-flung door, down the staircase, and then, seeing the butler ahead, turned sharp off to the little-used part of the corridor and so into the library. She made straight for the iron staircase to the grounds, and came face to face with Robert Maper.

Twilight was not his hour for the library — she saw even through her perturbation that he was packing it in fond memory. His face lighted up with amazement, as though the dead had come up through a tombstone.

"Good-by!" she said, shifting her handbag to her

left hand and holding out her right. Her self-possession pleased her.

"What!" he cried. And again he had the gasp of a fish out of water.

"Yes, I came to say good-by."

"You are leaving us?"

"Yes."

"Oh, and it is I that have driven you away!"

"No, no, don't reproach yourself, please don't. Good-by."

He gasped in silence. She gave a little laugh. "Now that I offer you my hand, it is you who won't take it."

He seized it. "Oh, Eil—Miss O'Keeffe—let me keep it."

"Please! we settled that."

"It will never be settled till you are my wife."

"Listen!" said Eileen, dramatically. "In a few minutes your mother and father will be seated at dinner. Your mother will have told your father I've left the house in disgrace. Don't interrupt. Would you be prepared to walk in upon them with me on your arm and to say, 'Mother, father, Miss O'Keeffe has done me the honour of consenting to be my wife'?"

With her warm hand still in his, how could he hesitate? "Oh, Eileen, if you'd only let me!"

The imagination of the tableau was only less tempting to Eileen. It was procurable—she had

only to move her little finger, or rather not to move it. But the very facility of production lessened the tableau's temptingness. The triumph was complete without the vulgar actuality.

"I can't," she said, withdrawing her hand. "But you are a good fellow. Good-by." She moved towards the garden steps. He was incredulous of the utter end. "I shall write to you," he said.

"This is a short cut," she murmured, descending. As her feet touched the grass she smiled. How they had both tried to stop her, mother and son! She hurried through the shrubbery, and by a side gate was out on the old wagon road. More slowly, but still at a good pace, she descended towards the Black Hole, now beginning to twinkle and glimmer with lights, and far less grimy and prosaic than in the crude day.

X

While packing her big box, she had decided to try to lodge that night with a programme-girl she had got to know at the Theatre Royal, and the motive that set her pace was the desire to find her before she had started for the theatre.

The girl usually hovered about Mrs. Maper's box. Once Eileen had asked her why she wasn't in evidence the week before. "Lord, miss," she said, "didn't you recognise me on the stage?"

Eileen thus discovered that the girl sometimes

figured as a super, when travelling companies came with sensational pieces, relying upon local talent, hastily drilled, for the crowds. Mary became a Greek slave, or a Billingsgate fishwife, with amusing unexpectedness.

Eileen's next discovery about the girl was that she supported a paralysed mother, though the bed-ridden creature on inspection proved to be more cheerful than the visitors she depressed. Mr. Maper had sent her grapes from his hothouse only a few days before, and in taking them to the little house Eileen had noticed a "Bedroom to Let."

To her relief, when she reached the bleak street, she could see that though the blind was down, the bill was still in the window. Her spirits bubbled up again. Ere she could knock at the door, the programme-girl bounced through it, hatted and cloaked for the theatre.

"Miss O'Keeffe!" She almost staggered backward. Eileen's face worked tragically in the gloom.

"There are villains after me!" Eileen gasped. "Take this bag, it contains the family jewels. That bedroom of yours, it is still to let?"

"Yes, miss."

"I take it for to-night, perhaps for ever. The avenger is on my footsteps. The law may follow me, but I shall defy its myrmidons in my trackless eyrie."

"Oh, Miss O'Keeffe! You frighten me. I

shouldn't like to have all these jewels in my house, and with my mother tied to her bed."

Eileen burst into a laugh. "Oh, miss!" she said, mimicking the programme-girl. "Didn't you recognise me on the stage?"

"Mary Murchison!" gasped the programme-girl. "Oh, Miss O'Keeffe, how wonderful! You nearly made my heart stop —"

"I am sorry, but I do want to take your bedroom. I've left Mrs. Maper, and you are not to ask any questions."

"I haven't time, I'm late already. Fortunately, I only come on in the second act."

"That's nice; put my bag in and I'll come to the theatre with you." The thought was impromptu, an evening with a bedridden woman was not exhilarating at such a crisis.

"You ought to be an actress yourself," the programme-girl remarked admiringly on the way.

Eileen shuddered. "No, thank you. Scream the same thing night after night — like a parrot with not even one's own words — I should die of monotony."

"Oh, it isn't at all monotonous. It's a different audience every night, and even the laughs come in different places. My parts have mostly been thinking parts — to-night I'm a prince without a word — but still it's fun."

"But how can you bear strange men staring at you?"

"One gets used to it. The first time they put me in tights I blushed all through the piece, but they had painted me so thick it wasn't visible."

"In short, you blushed unseen."

Eileen wished to go to the pit, but her new friend would not hear of her not occupying her habitual box, since she knew that the management would be glad to have it occupied if it were empty. This proved to be the case, and put the seal upon Eileen's enjoyment of the situation. To spend her evening in Mrs. Maper's box was indeed a climax.

She borrowed theatre-paper and scribbled a note to her ex-employer, giving the address for her trunk. An orange and some biscuits sufficed for her dinner.

Not till she was in her little bedroom, surrounded by pious texts, did she break down in tears.

XI

The next morning, as she sat answering advertisements, the programme-girl knocked at the door of the bedroom and announced that Mr. Maper had called.

Eileen turned red. It was too disconcerting. Would he never take "no" for an answer? "I won't see him. I can't see him," she cried.

The girl departed and returned. "Oh, Miss O'Keeffe, he begs so for only one word."

"The word is 'no.'"

"After he's been so kind as to bring your box down!"

"Oh, has he? Then the word is 'thanks.'"

"Please, miss, would you mind giving it to him yourself?"

"Who's Irish, you or I? I won't speak to him at all, I tell you."

"But I don't like to send him away like that, when he's been so kind to mother."

"When has he been kind to your mother?"

"Those grapes you brought—"

"That was old Mr. Maper."

"So is this."

"Oh!" Eileen was quite taken aback, for once.
"All right, I'll go into the parlour."

He was infinitely courteous and apologetic. He had been very anxious about her. Why had she been so unkind as to leave, and without ever a good-bye to him?

"Oh, hasn't your wife told you, then?"

"She has told me you were rude, and that you left without notice, and she wants me to prosecute you. I suppose you lost your temper. You found her rather difficult."

"I found her impossible," said Eileen, frigidly.

"Yes, yes, I understand." He was flushed and unhappy. "You found her impossible to live with?"

Eileen nodded; she would have added "or to make a lady of," but he looked so purple and agitated

that she charitably forbore. She was wondering whether Mrs. Maper could really have been so mean as to omit her share in the quarrel, but he went on eagerly :—

"Quite so, quite so. And what do you think it has been for me?"

She murmured inarticulate sympathy.

"Ah, if you only knew! Oh, my dear Miss O'Keeffe, while you've been in the house, it's been like heaven."

"I'm glad I've given satisfaction," she said drily.

"Then what do you give by going? I assure you the day you came to the works it was like heaven there too."

"You forget the temperature," Eileen smiled. "However, it was a very nice day, and I thank you. But I can't come back after—"

"Who asks you to come back?" he broke in. "No, I should be sorry to see you again in a menial position, you with your divine gifts of beauty and song. The idea of your getting a new place," he added with a fall into prose, "makes me feel sick."

"I value your sympathy, but it is misplaced," she replied freezingly.

"Sympathy! It isn't sympathy! It's jealousy. Oh, my dear Miss O'Keeffe!" He seized her limp hand. "Eileen! Let me help you—"

As the true significance of his visit, and of the purple agitation, dawned upon her, the grim humour

of the position overbore every other feeling. Her hand still in his, she began to laugh, and no biting of her lips could do more than change the laugh into an undignified snigger. Instead of profiting by his grip of her, he dropped her hand suddenly as if a hose had been turned on his passion, and this surrender of her hand reduced Eileen to a passable gravity.

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Maper. But really, life is too horribly amusing."

"I'm very sorry it's me that affords you amusement," he said stiffly.

"No, it isn't you at all, it's just the whole thing. You've been most kind all along. And I dare say you mean to be kind now. But I don't really need any help. Your wife's threats of prosecution are ridiculous, she made my longer stay impossible. I could more justly claim a month's notice from her."

"That's what I thought. I've brought you a month's salary." He fumbled in his pocket-book.

"Don't trouble. I shall not accept it."

"You shall," he said sternly. "Or I'll prosecute you."

Eileen's laugh rang out clear. This time he laughed too.

"Now, don't you call life amusing?" she said. "Here am I to take a cheque under penalty of having to pay it."

"Well, which shall it be?"



EILEEN O'KEEFFE, THE "GOVERNESS."

"Such a cheque is charming." And she held out her hand. He put the cheque in it and shook both warmly. They parted, the best of friends.

"Come to me for a character, of course," he said.

"Don't you come to me," replied Eileen, with a roguish smile.

XII

Eileen's next place was — as if by contrast — with a much more genteel family, and a much poorer, though it flew higher socially. It lived in a house, half in a fashionable London terrace, half in a shabby side street, and its abode was typical of its ambitions and its means. Mrs. Lee Carter drew the line clearly between herself and her governess, which was a blessing, for it meant Eileen's total exclusion from her social life, and Eileen's consequent enjoyment of her own evenings at home or abroad, as she wished. This unusual freedom compensated for the hard work of teaching children in various stages of growth and ignorance how to talk French and play the piano. Her salary was small, for Mrs. Lee Carter's ambition to live beyond her neighbours' means was only achieved by pinching whomever she could. She was not bad-hearted; she simply could not afford anything but luxuries. Eileen wondered at not being asked sometimes to perform at her parties, till she found that only celebrities ever did anything in that house.

This was a period of much mental activity in Eileen's life. The tossing ocean of London life, the theatres that played Shakespeare, the world of new books and new thought, her recent perusal of Plato and of man, all produced fermentation. But every night she knelt by her bedside and said her "Ave Maria" with a voluptuous sense of spiritual peace, and every morning she woke with a certain joy in existence and a certain surprise to find herself again existing. Her old convent-thought recurred. "We are worked from without — marionettes who can watch their own performance. And it is very amusing." Once she read of a British action in Afghanistan against border-tribes, and she wondered if Lieutenant Doherty was in the fighting. Since she had ceased to be his mother-confessor he had become very shadowy; his image now rose substantial from the newspaper lines, and she was surprised to find in herself a little palpitation at his probable perils. "One's heartstrings, too, are pulled," she thought. "I don't like it. Marionettes should move, not feel." These reflections, however, came to her more often anent her family, and the struggles of her kin for a livelihood touched her more deeply than any love. "We are like bits of the same shattered body," she thought. "In these cold English families everybody is another body." She sent most of her salary to Ireland, and her pocket-money came from singing in the choir on Sunday.

The bass chorister was a very amusing man. His voice was sepulchral but his conversation skittish. Eileen's repartees smote him to almost the only serious respect of his life, and one day he said: "Why, there's a future in you. Why don't you go on the stage?"

"What nonsense!" But the blood was secretly stirred in her veins. She saw herself walking along the Black Hole with the programme-girl, but her point of view had been modified since she had received a similar suggestion with a shudder. If she could play Rosalind to a great London audience, the staring men-folk would matter little.

"Why not?" went on the bass tempter. "A humour like yours with such a voice and such a face!"

"The stage is full of better voices and better faces."

"No, indeed. Why, there isn't a girl at the Half-and-Half —" He stopped and almost blushed.

She smiled. "Oh, I don't mind your going to such places. What is the Half-and-Half, a place where they drink beer?"

"Oh, it's just our slang name for a little music-hall that's just between the East End and the West End, with a corresponding programme."

"*Our* slang name?"

"Well —" he paused. "If you'll keep it very dark — but of course you will — I appear there myself."

"You! What do you do?"

"I sing patriotic songs and drinking-songs —"

"Aren't they the same thing in England?"

"Don't say that on the stage or they'll throw pewter pots. They're very patriotic."

"That's just what I said. What's your name — I suppose you change it?"

"Yes — as I hope you will yours — some day."

"I shan't take yours."

"Nobody axed you, miss," he said. "And, besides, mine is copyright — Jolly Jack Jenkins. I make a fiver a week by it."

"A fiver!" The bass chorister suddenly took on an air of Arabian nights. At this rate she could buy back the family castle. Her struggling brothers — how they would bless their magician sister — Mick should have a London practice, Miles a partnership in an engineering firm.

"You come with me and see Fossy," continued Jolly Jack Jenkins.

Eileen declined with thanks. It took a week of Sundays to argue away her objections — religious, moral, and social. To play Rosalind to fashionable London was one thing: to appear at a variety theatre or low-class music-hall, which nobody in her world or Mrs. Lee Carter's had ever heard of, was another pair of shoes. Yet strange to say, it was the last consideration that decided her to try. Even if admitted to the boards, she could make her failure in secure obscurity. It would simply be another girl-

ish escapade, and she was ripe for mischief after her long sobriety.

"But even your Mr. Fossy mustn't know my real name or address," she stipulated.

"Who shall I say you are?"

"Nelly O'Neill."

"Ripping. Flows from the tongue like music."

"Then it's rippling you mean."

"What a tongue! Wait till Fossy sees you."

"Will he ask me to stick it out?"

"Oh, Lord, I wish I had your repartee. But I'm thinking — Nelly O'Neill — doesn't it give you away a bit?"

"Keeps me a bit, too. I shouldn't like to lose myself altogether — gain reputation for another woman."

Fossy proved to be a gentleman named Josephs, who in a tiny triangular room near the stage of the Half-and-Half listened critically to her comic singing, shook his head and said he would let her know. Eileen left the room with leaden heart and feet.

"Wait for me a moment, please," Jolly Jack Jenkins called after her, and she hung about timidly, jostled by dirty attendants and painted performers. She was reading a warning to artistes that any improper songs or lines would lead to their instant dismissal, and regretting more than ever her incompetence for this innocent profession, when she heard the bass chorister's big breathing behind her.

"Bravo! You knocked him all of a heap."

"Rubbish! Don't try to cheer me."

"You!" Jolly Jack Jenkins opened his eyes. "You taken in by Fossy! He'll suggest your doing a trial turn next Saturday night when the public are least critical, you'll make a furore, and he'll offer you two guineas a week."

"A pleasing picture, but quite visionary. Why, he didn't even ask for an address to write to!"

"Oh, I dare say he thought care of me would find you. No, don't glower at me—I don't mean anything wrong."

"I hope you didn't let him misunderstand—"

"You asked me not to let him know too much. Fossy has to do so much with queer folk—"

"Yes, I saw he had to warn them against improper songs."

Jolly Jack Jenkins exploded in a guffaw.

"I'm sorry I came," said Eileen, in vague distress.

"Fossy isn't," he retorted. "He was clean bowled over. In that Irish fox-hunting song all the gallery will be shouting 'Tally-ho!' Where did you pick it up?"

"I didn't *pick* it up, I *made* it up for the occasion."

"By Jove! I have to pay a guinea to a bloodsucking composer when *I* want a song. Oh, Fossy's spotted a winner this time."

"Why is he called Fossy?"

"I don't know. Nobody knows. I found the name, I pass it on."

"Perhaps it's a corruption of Foxy."

"There! I never thought of that! You *are* a —!"

The jolly chorister's mouth remained open. But the prophecy that had already issued from it came true in every detail.

XIII

Despite her private stage-fright, Nelly O'Neill, the new serio-comic, made a big hit. Her innocent roguery was captivating; her virginal freshness floated over the footlights, like a spring breeze through the smoky Hall.

"Well, you *are* an all-round success," cried Jolly Jack Jenkins, pumping her hand off at the wings, amid a thunder of applause, encores, and whistles.

"You mean a Half-and-Half!" laughed Nelly through Eileen's tears. She had given herself to the audience, but how it had given itself in return, flashing back to her in electric waves its monstrous vitality, its apparently single life.

The Half-and-Half was one of those early Victorian halls of the people, with fixed stars and only a few meteors. The popular favourites changed their songs and their clothes at periodic intervals, but they would have lost favour if they had not remained the same throughout everything. A chairman with a hammer announced the turns, and condescendingly took champagne with anybody who paid for it. Eileen soon became an indispensable

part of this smoky world. She signed an agreement at three guineas a week for three years, to perform only at the Half-and-Half. Fossy saw far. Eileen did not. She jumped for joy when she got beyond eyeshot. She felt herself jumping out of the governess-life. Second thoughts and soberer footsteps brought doubt. She had intended telling Mrs. Lee Carter as soon as the trial-performance was over, but now she hesitated and was lost. Half the charm lay in the secret adventure, the dare-devilry. Besides, as a governess she had a comfortable home and a respectable status, and she had already seen and divined enough of the world behind the footlights to shrink from being absorbed into it. What fun in the double life! She had never found a single life worth living. She would belong to two worlds—be literally Half-and-Half. Nelly O'Neill must only be born at twilight. But she felt she could not be out uniformly every evening without some explanation.

"Mrs. Lee Carter," she said, "I have to tell you of a peculiar chance of augmenting my income that has come to me."

Mrs. Lee Carter, wearing plumes and train for a court reception, paled. "You are not going to leave me!"

The naïve exclamation strengthened Eileen's hand.

"I don't quite see how to do otherwise," she said boldly.

"Oh, dear, I wish I could afford more. I know you're worth it."

Eileen thought, "If you'd only give your guests good claret instead of bad champagne!" But she said, "You are very kind—you have always been most considerate."

The plumes wagged.

"I try to please all parties."

Nelly O'Neill thought, "And to give too many." Eileen said, "Yes, you've given me my evenings to myself as it is, and considering the new work is only in the evenings, I did think of running the two, but I'm afraid —"

"If we lightened your work a little —" interrupted Mrs. Lee Carter, eagerly.

"I shouldn't so much ask that as to have perfect freedom like a young man—a latchkey even." Never had Eileen looked more demure and Puritan.

"Oh, I hope you won't be working too late —"

"The people who go there are engaged in the day-time. I'd better be frank with you; it's an extremely unfashionable place towards the East End, and I quite understand you may not like me to take it. At the same time I shall never meet anybody who knows me. In fact, it's a dancing and singing place."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Lee Carter, blankly. "I didn't know you could teach dancing, too."

"You never asked me. . . . Of course, if you prefer it, I could come here as a day governess and

leave after tea. . . . You see it's a longish journey home: I'm bound to be late. . . ."

"What's the difference? Come and go as you please. . . . Of course you won't mind using the back door when there's a party. . . . the servants

For the deception Eileen at first salved her conscience Irish-wise by sending every farthing to her mother under the deceiving pretext of rich private rapids. She would not even deduct for cabs. Sometimes she could not get an omnibus, but she almost preferred to walk till she was footsore, for both riding and walking were forms of penance. The stuffy omnibus interior after the smoky Hall was nauseating, and in those days no lady thought of climbing the steep ladder to the slanting roof. But it sometimes happened that a crawling cabman coming westward would invite her to a free ride, and Eileen would accept gratefully, and, moreover, gain from conversations with her drivers new material for her songs.

This period of her life was almost as amusing as she had anticipated: her only depressions came from the children of the footlights, and the necessity of adjusting herself superficially to her environment, under pain of unpopularity. Her isolation and the poverty of her home-life already made sufficiently for this. And to be disliked even by those she disliked Eileen disliked. Her nature needed to wallow in warm admiration. She got plenty.

When, fifteen months later, she agreed to pay Fossy a hundred pounds for modifying her contract so as to enable her to appear at other Halls, she said with a smile, "You deserve it. You are the only man at the Half-and-Half who hasn't made love to me."

Fossy grinned. "If I had known that, I should have demanded a larger compensation."

Even the bass chorister had not been able to resist proposing, though his grief at being refused was short-lived, for he died soon after by a fall from one of those giant wheels that were the saurians of the modern cycle. Eileen shed many a tear over Jolly Jack Jenkins.

With the growth of her popularity before and behind the footlights came heavier calls upon her geniality, and, like a hostess who tries to pay off her debts in one social lump sum, Eileen got "a Sunday out," and Nelly gave a lunch at a riverside hotel to a motley company of popular favourites. It was expensive; for the profession, even in those days, expected champagne. It was appallingly protracted; for the party, having no work to do that evening, showed no disposition to break up, and brandies-and-sodas succeeded one another in an aroma of masculine cigars and feminine cigarettes. It was noisy and hilarious, and gradually it became rowdy. The Singing Sisters sang, but not in duet. The Lion Comique, whose loyal melodies were on every barrel-organ,

argued Republicanism and flourished that day's copy of *Reynolds's Newspaper*. The beauteous Bessie Bilhook—"the Queen of Serio-Comics" was scandalously autobiographic, and the old plantation songster—looking unreal with his washed face—was with difficulty dissuaded from displaying his ability to dance on the table without smashing anything. The climax was reserved for the demure one-legged gymnast, who suddenly produced a pistol and discharged it in the air. When the panic subsided, he explained to the landlord and the company that he was "paying his shot."

"That's a hint for me to discharge the bill," said Nelly, adroitly, and, thanking everybody effusively for the happiness afforded her, she hurried home to Oxbridge Terrace, to wash it all away in nursery tea. The young Lee Carters made a restful spectacle with their shining innocent faces, and she almost wished they would never grow up.

As her success grew, offers from the pantomimes and even the legitimate stage began to reach her. But now she would not make the step. At the Halls she was her own mistress, able to arrange at her own convenience with orchestras. Even Rosalind would have meant long rehearsals and a complex interference with her governess-life.

At the theatres, too, to judge by all she heard, a sordid side of the profession was accentuated. The players played for their own hands, and even the

greatest did not disdain to "queer" the effects of their subordinates, whenever such effects did not heighten their own. Hamlet had been known to be jealous of the ghost, and the success of his sepulchral bass. It was in fact a world of jostling jealousies, as hidden from the public as the prompter. In the Halls she was her own company and her own playwright and her own composer. She had her elbows free.

And even here Bessie Bilhook, whose vanity was a byword in Lower Bohemia, and who had arrogantly assumed the sovereignty of the Serio-Comics, refused to appear on the same programmes unless her name was printed twice as large as Nelly O'Neill's, and was further displayed on a board outside, alone in its nine-inch glory. Again, actresses were recognised by the newspapers; the Halls had as yet no status. Their performers were not so photographed; indeed, Eileen refused to sit. She desired this obscurer form of celebrity. If her fame should ever reach Mrs. Lee Carter, the game would be nearly up. Her poor mother might even suffer the shock of it; perhaps the professional future of her brothers would be injured. Her sedate life had grown as dear as her noisy life, she loved the transition to the innocent home circle.

Yet in this very domesticity lay a danger. It provoked her to an ever broader humour on the stage. She let herself go, like a swimmer emboldened by

a boat behind. Eileen O'Keeffe she felt would rescue Nelly O'Neill if licence carried her too near the falls. It was so irresistibly seductive, this swift response of the audience to the wink of suggestion. Like a vast lyre, the Hall vibrated to the faintest breath of roguishness. Almost in contemptuous mockery one was tempted to experiment. . . .

One day, in a sudden horror of herself, she pleaded illness and hurried back to her mother for a holiday.

XIV

The straggling village looked much the same, the same pigs and turkeys rooted and strutted, the same stinging turf-smoke came from the doors and windows (save from one or two cabins unroofed by the Castle tyrant), the same weeds grew in the potato-patches, the same old men in patched brogues pulled their caubeens from their heads and their dudeens from their mouths, as she went past, half-consciously studying the humours for stage reproduction. It was hard for her to remember she wasn't "the Quality" in London, or that the Half-and-Half existed simultaneously with these beloved woods and waters. In only one particular was the village changed. Golf links had been discovered near it, a club-house had sprung up and the peasants found themselves enriched by the employment of their gossoons as caddies. The O'Keeffes were prospering equally—thanks to her subsidies—although

she hadn't yet bought them back their castle. "All's for the best in the greenest of isles," she told herself, as she sat basking in family affection.

And yet the wave of melancholia refused to ebb. Indeed, it swelled and grew blacker. The remedy seemed to intensify the disease; a holiday but gave her time to possess her soul, and brood upon its stains, her childhood's scene but enabled her to measure the realities of her achievement against the visions of girlhood. Life seemed too hopeless, too absurd. To amuse the gross adult, to instruct the innocent child — what did it all mean to her own life? She was tired of doing, she wanted to *be* something; something for herself. She was always observing, imitating, caricaturing, but what was *she*? A nothing, a phantasm, an emptiness.

"Eileen avourneen," said her mother, suddenly. "I wish you were married."

Eileen opened her eyes. "Dear heart, is this another offer from the castle?" And she laughed gently.

Mrs. O'Keeffe's fingers played uneasily with her bosom's cross. "No, but I should feel happier about you. It — it settles people."

"It certainly does," Eileen laughed, and her celebrated ditty, "The Marriage Settlement," flashed upon her. "Oh, dear," and her laugh changed to a sigh. "The marriages I see around me!"

"What! Isn't Mrs. Lee Carter happy?"

Eileen flushed. "I shouldn't like to be in her shoes," she said evasively.

"Officers seem to make the best husbands," said Mrs. O'Keeffe.

"Because they are so much away?" queried Eileen, with a vague memory of her Lieutenant Doherty.

That night the melancholia was heavy as a nightmare, without the partial unconsciousness of sleep. This blackness must be "the horrors" she had heard women of her stage-world speak of. She wanted to spring out of bed, to run to her mother's room. But that would have meant hysteric confession, so she bit her lips and stuck her nails into the sheet. Perhaps suicide would be simplest. She was nothing; it would not even be blowing out a light. No, she *was* something, she was a retailer of gross humours, a vile sinner; it might be kindling more than a light, an eternal flame. "Child of Mary," indeed! She deserved to be strangled with her white ribbon. And she exaggerated everything with that morbid mendacity of the confessional.

Two days later she went for a walk along the springy turf of the valley. The sun shone overhead, but from her spirit the mist had not quite lifted. Suddenly a small white ball came scudding towards her feet. She looked round and saw herself amid little flags sticking in the ground. Distant voices came to her ear.

"This must be the new game that's creeping in from

Scotland," she thought. "Perhaps I ought to have a song ready if ever it catches on. Ah, here comes one of the young fools — I'll watch him —"

He came, clothed as in a grey skin that showed the beautiful modelling of his limbs. His face glowed.

"Ouidà's Apollo," she thought, but in the very mockery she trembled, struck as by a lightning shaft. The blackness was sucked up into fire and light. "Am I in the way?" she said with her most bewitching smile.

He raised his hat. "I was afraid you might have been struck."

"Perhaps I was," she could not help saying.

"Oh, gracious, are you hurt?" His voice was instantly caressing.

"Do I look an object for ambulances?"

He smiled dazzlingly. "You look awfully jolly." Later Eileen remembered how she had taken this reply for a line of poetry.

A week later the Hon. Reginald Winsor, younger brother of an English Earl, was teaching Eileen golf.

It had been a week of ecstasy.

She thought of Reginald the last thing at night and the first thing in the morning and dreamed of him all night.

Now she knew what her life had lacked — to be caught up into another's personality, to lose one's petty individuality in — in what? Surely not in a

larger; she couldn't be so blind as that. In what then? Ah, yes, in Nature. He was gloriously elemental. He wasn't himself. He was the masculine. Yes, that was the correlative element her being needed. The mere manliness of his pipe made its aroma in his clothes adorable. Or was it his big simplicity, in which she could bury all her torturing complexity? Oh, to nestle in it and be at rest. Yet she held him at arm's length. When they shook hands her nerves thrilled, but she was the colder outwardly for very fear of herself.

On the ninth day he proposed.

Eileen knew it would be that day. Lying in bed that morning, she found herself caught by her old impersonal whimsy. "I'm a fever, and on the ninth day of me the man comes out in a rash proposal." Ah, but this time she was in a tertian, too. What a difference from those other proposals—proper or improper. Her mind ran over half a dozen, with a touch of pity she had not felt at the time. Poor Bob Maper, poor Jolly Jack Jenkins, if it was like this they felt! But was it her fault? No man could say she had led him on—except, perhaps, the Hon. Reginald, and towards him her intentions were honourable, she told herself smiling. But the jest carried itself farther and more stingingly. Could he make an "honourable" woman of her? Ah, God, was she worthy of him, of his simple manhood? And would he continue proposing, if she told him



BOW, BOW, DON JUAN OF AFGHANISTAN AND NELLY O'NEILL THE QUEEN OF SERIO-COMICS.

she was Nelly O'Neill? And what of his noble relatives? No, no, she must not run risks. She was only Eileen O'Keeffe, she had never left Ireland save for the Convent. The rest was a nightmare. How glad she was that nobody knew!

The proposal duly took place in a bunker, while Eileen was whimsically vituperating her ball. The fascination of her virginal *diablerie* was like a force compelling the victim to seize her in his arms after the fashion of the primitive bridegroom. However the poor Honourable refrained, said boldly, "Try it with this," and under pretence of changing her golf-sticks possessed himself of her hand. For the first time his touch left her apathetic.

"Now it is coming," she thought, and suddenly froze to a spectator of the marionette show. As the Hon. Reginald went through his performance, she felt with a shudder of horror over what brink she had nearly stepped. The man was merely a magnificent animal! She, with her heart, her soul, her brain, mated to that! Like a convict chained to a log. Not worthy of him forsooth! "There's a gulf between us," she thought, "and I nearly fell down it." And the Half-and-Half rose before her, clamouring, pungent, deliciously seductive.

"Dear Mr. Winsor," she listened with no less interest to her own part in the marionette performance, "it's really too bad of you. Just as I was getting on so nicely, too!"

"Is that all you feel about—about our friendship?"

"All? Didn't you undertake to teach me golf? I haven't the faintest desire not to go on . . . as soon as we have escaped from this wretched bunker. Come! Did you say the niblick?"

Reginald's manners were too good to permit him to swear, even at golf.

"One's body is like an Irish mud-cabin," Eileen reflected. "It shelters both a soul and a pig."

XV

Nelly O'Neill threw herself into her work with greater ardour than ever. But her triumphs were shadowed by worries. She was nervous lest the Hon. Reginald should turn up at one of her Halls—she had three now; she was afraid her voice was spoiling in the smoky atmosphere; sometimes the image of the Hon. Reginald came back reproachfully, sometimes tantalisingly. Oh, why was he so stupid? Or was it she who had been stupid?

Then there was the apprehension of the end of her career at the Lee Carters'. The young generation was nearly grown up. The eldest boy she even suspected of music-halls. He might stumble upon her.

Her popularity, too, was beginning to frighten her. Adventurous young gentlemen followed her in cabs—cabs were now a necessity of her triple appearance—and she never dared drive quite to

her door or even the street. Bracelets she always returned, if the address was given; flowers she sent to hospitals, anonymous gifts to her family. Nobody ever saw her wearing his badge.

A sketch of her even found its way to one of Mrs. Lee Carter's journals.

"Why, she looks something like me!" Eileen said boldly.

"You flatter yourself," said Mrs. Lee Carter. "You're both Irish, that's all. But I don't see why these music-hall minxes should be pictured in respectable household papers."

"Some people say that the only real talent is now to be found in the Halls," said Eileen.

"Well, I hope it'll stay there," rejoined her mistress, tartly. Eileen recalled this conversation a few nights later, when she met Master Harold Lee Carter outside the door at midnight with a rival latchkey.

"Been to a theatre, Miss O'Keeffe?" asked her whilom pupil.

"No; have you?"

"Well, not exactly a theatre!"

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Sort of half-and-half place, you know."

By the icy chill at her heart at his innocent phrase, she knew how she dreaded discovery and clung to her social status.

"What is a half-and-half place?" she asked smiling.

"Oh, comic songs and tumblers and you can smoke."

"No? You're not really allowed to smoke in a theatre?"

"Yes, we are. They call it a music-hall—it's great fun. But don't tell the mater."

"You naughty boy!"

"I don't see it. All the chaps go."

She shook her head. "Not the nicest."

"Oh, that's tommyrot," he said disrespectfully. "Their women folk don't know—that's all."

Eileen now began to feel like a criminal round whom the toils thicken. In the most fashionable of her three Halls, she sang a little French song. And she had taught Master Harold his French.

Of course, even if Nelly were seen by Eileen's friends or acquaintances, detection was not sure. Eileen was always in such sedate gowns, never low-cut, her manners were so suppressed, her hair done so differently, and what a difference hair made! In fact, it was in her private life that she felt herself more truly the actress. On the boards her real secret self seemed to flash forth, full of verve, dash, roguery, devilry. Should she take to a wig, or to character songs in appropriate costumes? No, she would run the risk. It gave more spice to life. Every evening now was an adventure, nay three adventures, and when she snuggled herself up at midnight in her demure white bed, overlooked by the

crucifix, she felt like the hunted were-wolf, safely back in human shape. And she became more audacious, letting herself go, so as to widen the chasm between Nelly and Eileen, and make anybody who should suspect her be sure he was wrong. And occasionally she paid for all this fever and gaiety by fits of the blackest melancholy.

She had gradually dropped her habit of prayer, but in one of her dark moods she found herself slipping to her knees and crying: "Oh, Holy Mother, look down on Thy distressed daughter, and deliver her from the body of this death. So many wooers and no spark of love in herself; a woman who sings love-songs with lips no man has touched, a lone-of-soul who can live neither with the respectable nor with the Bohemians, who loves you, *sanctissima Maria*, without being sure you exist. Oh, Holy Mother of God, advocate of sinners, pray for me. If I had only something solid to cling to—a babe to suckle with its red grotesque little face. You will say cling to the cross, but is not my whole life also a crucifixion? I am rent in twain that a thousand fools may laugh nightly. Oh, Holy Mother, make me, at one with myself; it is the atonement I need. Send me the child's heart, and I will light a hundred candles to you. . . . Or do you now prefer electricity? Oh, Maria mavourneen, I cannot pray to you, for there is a mocking devil within me, and you will not cast her out." And she burst into hysteric tears.

XVI

As she was about to start one evening for her round, Mrs. Lee Carter's maid brought up a bomb-shell. Superficially it looked like a letter with foreign stamps, marked "Private" and readdressed with an English stamp from Ireland. But that one line of unerased writing, her name, threw her into heats and colds, for she remembered the long-forgotten hand of Lieutenant Doherty. She had to sit down on her bed and finish trembling before she broke the seal and set free this voice from the past.

"DEAR MOTHER-CONFESSOR, — You will be wondering why I have been silent all these years and why I write now. Well, I will tell you the truth. It wasn't that I believed you had really gone into the Convent you wrote me you were joining, it was the new and exciting life and duties that opened up before me when I got to Afghanistan, far from post-offices. Afterwards I was drafted to India and had a lot of skirmishing and tiger-shooting, and your image — forgive me! — became faint, and I excused myself for not writing by making myself believe you were buried in the Convent. ["So, after all, he never got the letter telling him I was going to marry back the Castle!" Eileen mused joyfully through her agitation.] But now that I am at last coming home in a few months, no longer a minor, but nearer a major

(that's like one of your old jokes)—somehow your face seems to be the only thing I am coming back for. It's no use trying to explain it all, or even apologising. It's just like that. I've *confessed*, you see, though it is hopeless to get straight with my arrears, so I won't attempt it. And when I found out how I felt, of course came the horrible thought that you might be in the Convent after all, or, worse still, married and done for, so what do you think I did? I just sent this cable to your mother: 'Is Eileen free? Reply paid. Colonel Doherty.' Wasn't it clever and economical of me to think of the word 'free,' meaning such a lot—not married, not a nun, not even engaged to another fellow? Imagine my joy when I got back the monosyllable, meaning all that lot. I instantly cabled back 'Thanks, don't tell her of this.' ["So that's what mother was hinting at," thought Eileen, with a smile.] It was all I could do not to cable to you: 'Will you marry me? Reply paid.' ["What a good idea for a song!" murmured Nelly.] Put me out of my agony as soon as you can, won't you, dearest Eileen? Your face is floating before me as I write, with its black Irish eyes and its roguish dimples. . . ."

She could read no more. She sat long on her bed, dazed by the rush of bitter-sweet memories. The Convent, her father, her early years, this dear boy . . . all was washed together in tears. There was

something so bizarre, unexpected and ingenuous about it all; it touched the elemental in her. If he had excused himself even, she would have tossed him off impatiently. But his frank exposure of his own self-contradictoriness appealed subtly to her. Was this the want in her life, was it for him she had been yearning, below the surface of her consciousness, even as she had remained below the surface of his? Here, indeed, was salvation — providential salvation. A hand was stretched to save her — snatch her from spiritual destruction. The dear brown manly hand that had potted tigers while she had been gesticulating on platforms — a performing lioness. Distance, imagination, early memories, united to weave a glamour round him. It was many minutes before she could read the postscript: "I think it right to say that my complexion is not yellow nor my liver destroyed. I know this is how we are represented on your stage. I have sat for a photograph, especially to send you."

The stage! Why should he just stumble upon the word, to chill her with the awful question whether she would have to tell him. She was late at her engagements, her performance was perfunctory — she was no longer with "the boys," but seated in a howdah on an elephant's back, side by side with a mighty hunter, or walking with a tall flaxen-haired lieutenant between the honeysuckled hedges of an Irish boreen. It struck her as almost miraculous —

though it was probably only because her attention was now drawn to the name—that she read of Colonel Doherty in the evening paper the gasman tendered her that very evening, as she waited at the wing. It was a little biography full of deeds of der-ringdo. “My Bayard!” she murmured, and her eyes filled with tears.

She wrote and tore up many replies. The first commenced: “What a strange way of proposing! You begin by giving me two black eyes to prove you’ve forgotten me. I am so different in other people’s eyes as well as in my own it would be unfair to accept you. You are in love with a shadow.” The word-play about her eyes seemed to savour of the “Half-and-Half.” She struck it out. But “you are in love with a shadow,” remained the *Leit-motif* of all the letters. And if he was grasping at a shadow it would be unfair for her to grasp at the substance.

The correspondence continued by every Indian mail after his receipt of her guarded refusal; he Quixotic, devoted, no matter how she had changed. He loved the mere scent of her letter paper. Was she only a governess? Had she been a charwoman, he would have kissed her cheeks white. The boyish extravagance of his passion worked upon her, troubling her to her sincerest core. She would hide nothing from him. She wrote a full account of her stage career, morbidly exaggerating the vulgarity of

her performance and the degradation of her character. She was blacker than any charwoman, she said with grim humour. The moment she dropped the letter into the box, a trembling seized on all her limbs. She spent three days of torture; her fear of losing him seeming to have heightened her love for him.

Then Mrs. Lee Carter handed her a cable.

"Sailing unexpectedly S.S. *Colombo* to-morrow — Doherty." She nearly fell fainting in dual joy. He was coming home, and he would cross her letter. Before it could return they would be safely married. It should be destroyed unread.

"Is anything wrong?" said her mistress.

"No, quite the contrary."

"I am glad, because I had rather unpleasant news to tell you. But you must have seen that when Kenneth goes to Winchester, there will practically be nothing for you to do."

"How lucky! For I am going to be married."

"Oh, my dear, I am so glad," gushed Mrs. Lee Carter.

Afterwards Eileen marvelled at the obvious finger of Providence unravelling her problems. She had never relished the idea of finding another place, not easily would she find one so dovetailing into her second life; she might have been tempted to burn her boats.

She prepared now to burn her ships instead. Her contracts with the Halls were now only monthly;

Nelly O'Neill could easily slip out of existence. She would not say she was going to be married—that would concentrate attention on herself. Illness seemed the best excuse. For the one week after the *Colombo's* arrival she could send conscience money. The Saturday it was due found her still starved; she did not believe his ship would get in till late, and managers would particularly dislike being done out of her Saturday night turn. Perhaps she ought to have left the previous week, she thought. It was foolish to rush things so close. But it was not so easy to give up the habits of years, and activity allayed the fever of waiting. She had sent an ardent letter to meet the ship at Southampton, saying he was to call at the Lee Carters' in Oxbridge Terrace on Sunday afternoon, which she had to herself. Being only a poor governess, she would be unable to meet him at the station or receive him at the house on Saturday night, even if he got in so early. He must be resigned to her situation, she added jestingly. On the Saturday afternoon she received a wire full of their own hieroglyphic love-words, grumbling but obeying. How could he live till Sunday afternoon? Why hadn't she resigned her situation?

As she was starting for the Halls for the last time, in the dusk of a Spring day, a special messenger put into her hand a letter he had scribbled in the train. He was in London then. Her heart thumped with a medley of emotions as she tore open the letter:

"Oh, my darling, I shall see you at last face to face —" But she had no time to spend under the hall-light reading it. In her cab she struck a match and read another scrap. "But, oh, cruel one, not to let me come to-night!" She winced. That gave her a pause. If she had let him come—to the Half-and-Half! He would turn from her, shuddering. And was it not precisely to the Half-and-Half that honour should have invited him? The Half-and-Half arrived at the cab window ere she had finished pondering. She thrust the letter into her pocket.

XVII

Would she ever get through her three Halls? It did not seem as if she had strength for the Half-and-Half itself. She nerved herself to the task, and knew, not merely from the shrieks of delight, that she had surpassed herself. Happy and flushed she flung herself into her waiting cab.

She had the 9.45 turn at her second and most fashionable Hall—a Hall where the chairman had been replaced by programme numbers—and then would come her third and last appearance at 10.35. It was strange to think that in another hour Nelly O'Neill's career would be over. It seemed like murdering her. Yes, Eileen O'Keeffe would be her murderess. Well, why not murder what lay between one and happiness? As she waited at the wings, just before going on, while the orchestra played her opening bars, she

glanced diagonally at the packed stalls, and her heart stood still. There in the second row sat Colonel Doherty, smoking a big cheroot. Instinctively she made the sign of the cross ; then swayed back and was caught by the man who changed the programme-numbers.

"Is No. 9 come?" she gasped.

"I think so ; aren't you well, Miss O'Neill?"

"For God's sake, give me breathing space," she said, with a last wild peep at the Colonel. Yes, there was no mistaking him after the three new portraits he had sent her. He was in cheerful conversation with a stout, sallow gentleman of the Anglo-Indian stage-type. Both were in immaculate evening-dress and wore white orchids. How fortunate she had refused to send any photograph in return, pleading ugliness but really afraid of theatrical sketches that might find their way to the officers' mess!

The band stopped, changed its tune, No. 9 appeared on the board ; there was a murmur of confusion.

"No, by Heaven, I'll face the music," she said with grim humour. She almost hustled the hastening juggler out of the way. She was in a whirlwind of excitement. So he was there—well, so much the better. He had saved her from lying. He had given her an easy way of confessing. Words were so inadequate, he should see the reality: the stage to-night would be her confessional. She would extenuate nothing. She would throw herself furiously

into the fun and racket ; go to her broadest limits, else the confession would be inadequate. Then . . . if he survived the shock, . . . why then, perhaps, she'd insist on going on with this double life . . . ! He had risen in his seat. No, no, he must not go away, she could not risk the juggler boring him.

"I'm better ; I mustn't be late at my next shop," she murmured apologetically as the number and the music were changed back.

"Ah, she's come — she was late," came the murmurs of the audience as it stirred in excited expectation.

She flung on roguish, feverish, diabolical, seductive in low-cut bodice pranked with flowers. It was a frenzy of impromptu extravagance, dazzling even the orchestra ; each line accentuated by new gesture, the verses supplemented by new monologue ; a miracle of chic and improvisation, and the house rose at it. Out of the mist before her eyes thunder seemed to come in great roars and crashes. She almost groped her way to the wing.

She was recalled. The mist cleared. She bowed direct at him, smiling defiance from her sparkling eyes. He was applauding with his hands, his stick, his lungs ! Was it possible ? — yes, he had not recognised her !

Now came a new revulsion. Again she felt herself saved. She sang her other songs straight at him, and exaggerated them equally, half to tempt

Providence, half as a bold way of keeping Eileen still concealed. She heard his companion chuckling, "By Jove, Willie, she's mashed on you," as she threw a farewell kiss towards him. Then she hurried to her dressing-room and took out his letter. She had transferred it to the pocket of her theatrical gown, but had not as yet found time to finish it. Even before she re-perused it, another emotion had begun to possess her, a rush of resentment. So this was how he amused himself while waiting to clasp her in his arms! How would he ever live through the hours till Sunday afternoon, forsooth! She was jealous of the applause he lavished on Nelly O'Neill, incensed at his levity, at his immaculate evening-dress, at his white orchid. How dare he be so gay and debonair? Her anger rose as she read his protestations, his romantic professions. "O my darling, I shall sit up all night, thinking of you, re-reading all your dear letters, recalling our past, picturing our future. In short, as old Landor puts it: —

"A night of memories and of sighs
I consecrate to thee."

She crumpled the paper in her hand. There was a knock at the door; Fossy poked his head in. He had risen in the world of Halls, even as Nelly O'Neill.

"Might I present two friends of mine? They want so much to know you."

"You know I never see anybody, and that I have to hurry off."

"Then, I was to give you this bouquet."

He handed in a costly floral mass. Amid it lay a card, "Colonel Doherty." She crumpled his letter more viciously.

"Tell them I can give them ten minutes only. Oh, Fossy, it's an amusing Show, isn't it?"

"It was a rattling good show," said Fossy, half puzzled. "Come in, boys."

Entered the Anglo-Indian twain with shining faces and shirt-fronts, cheroots politely lowered.

"Oh, smoke away, gentlemen," cried Nelly O'Neill, facing them in all the dazzle of her flesh and the crudity of her stage-paint, and her over-lustrous eyes, "don't mind me. Which of you is the Colonel?"

The stout, sallow gentleman jocosely pushed his tall flaxen-haired companion forward. "Oh, I knew the Major was out of it," he grinned.

"Not at all, Major," said Nelly. "I only wanted to know which I had to thank for these lovely flowers."

"You have yourself to thank," said the Colonel, smartly. "By Jove! You gave us a treat. London was worth coming back to."

"Ah, you've been away from London?"

"Just back this very day from India —"

"And of course the first thing after a good dinner is the good old Friv —" put in the Major.

"Thank you, Major," said Fossy. "That's handsome of you. And now I'll leave you to Miss O'Neill."

"That's handsomer still," said the Colonel. And the three men guffawed. Eileen felt sick.

The Major began to talk of the music-halls of India; the Colonel chimed in. They treated her as a comrade, told her anecdotes of the *coulisses* of Calcutta. The Colonel retailed a jest of the bazaars.

"I permit smoke, not smoking-room stories," she said severely. At which the twain poked each other shriekingly in the ribs. After that Eileen let the Colonel have rope enough to hang himself with, though she felt it cutting cruelly into her own flesh. It was an orgie of the eternal masculine, spiced with the aroma of costly cigars.

"I'm so sorry," she said, when she had let them have a quarter of an hour's run. "I really must fly." And she seized the bouquet, and carefully adjusted his card in the glowing mass. "Won't you come and have tea with me to-morrow? About four."

The Colonel winced. "I fear I have another appointment."

"Oh, rot! I'll bring him," said the Major. "Where do you hang out?"

"22 Oxbridge," — her hesitation was barely perceptible — "Crescent."

The Colonel started. "Do you know it, Colonel?" She looked at him ingenuously.

"No, but how odd! My other appointment is at 22 Oxbridge Terrace."

"How funny!" laughed Eileen. "Just round the corner. Then you'll be able to kill two ladies with one cab." And she fled from the Major's cachinnation.

XVIII

She had missed her turn at the third Hall, but she did not care. She went on and gave a spiritless performance. It fell dead, but she cared less. Her head throbbed with a dozen possibilities. She was still undiscovered. As she sat resting on her couch ere resuming her work-a-day gown, her nerves stretched to snapping point, and old Irish songs crooning themselves irrelevantly in her brain, a telegram was handed her.

"He has found out," she thought, going hot and cold. She tore open the pink envelope . . . and burst into a shriek of laughter. The dresser rushed in, wondering. Nelly O'Neill merely held her sides, jollity embodied. "Oh, the Show, the Show!" she gasped, the tears streaking her painted cheeks.

The telegram that hung between her fingers in two sheets ran: "Reply prepaid. I don't know the ways of the stage so I send you this as a sure way of reaching you to ask when and where I may have the pleasure of calling upon your friend, Miss O'Keeffe, and

renewing the study of Plato.— ROBERT MAPER, Hotel Belgravia.”

“Any answer, miss?” said the imperturbable doorkeeper.

The answer flashed irresistibly into her mind as he spoke. Oh, she would play up to Bob Maper. Doubtless he imagined her fallen to the level of her *métier*, though he wasn't insulting. She scribbled hastily: “Robert Maper, Hotel Belgravia. I am waiting at the Hall for you. Come and take me to supper.— EILEEN O'NEILL.” She gave instructions he was to be admitted. Then she relapsed into her hysteric amusement. “Oh, the merry master of marionettes, the night my love comes from beyond the seas, you send me to supper with Robert Maper.” She waited with impatience. Now that the long-dreaded discovery had come, she was consumed with curiosity as to its effect upon the discoverer. At last she remembered to wash off the rouge and the messes necessary for stage-perspective. Her winsome face came back to her in the mirror, angelic by contrast, and while she was looking wonderingly at this mystic flashing mask of hers, there was a knock, and in another instant she was looking into the eyes burning unchanged under the white marble mantel-piece.

“Ah, there you are!” she said gaily, and shook his hand as though they had met the evening before. “Where shall we go?”

He accepted the situation. "I don't know—I thought you would know."

"I don't—I never supped with a man in my life."

He flushed with complex pleasure and surprise. "Really! Oh, Eileen!"

"Hush! Call me Nelly, if you must be Christian. I suppose you think you may, now."

"I—I beg your pardon," he stammered, disconcerted.

"Don't look so gaspy—poor little thing! It shall be thrown back into the water. Will you carry my bouquet?"

"With pleasure." He grasped it eagerly, and carried it towards the stage door and a hansom.

"It wanted only that," she said. "Oh, the Show, the Show!"

"I don't understand you."

"Do I understand myself?" They got into the hansom. "Where shall we go?" she repeated.

"Places all close at twelve on Saturday night."

"Ah, do they? Your hotel also?"

"No, of course one may eat at one's own hotel. If you don't mind going there—"

"If *you* don't mind, rather."

"I? Who is my censor?"

"Ah, the word admits I'm discreditable. Never mind, Bob. See how Christian I am."

"No, no, I've felt it was all my doing. Indirectly I drove you to it—oh, how you have weighed on me!"

"Really, I'd quite forgotten you."

He winced and gasped. "Hotel Belgravia," he called up through the trap-door.

"Very strange you should find me," she said, as they glided through the flashing London night.

"Not in the least. I knew you blindfold, so to speak. You forget how I used to stand outside the drawing-room, listening to your singing."

"Eavesdropper!" she murmured. But he struck a tender chord—all the tender chords of her twilight playing that now rose up softly and floated around her.

"Eavesdropper if you like, who heard nothing that was not beautiful. And so I hadn't to *look* for you. As a matter of fact, I wasn't looking but consulting my programme to know who number eleven was, when you began to sing."

"If you *had* looked you wouldn't have recognised me," she said, smiling.

"Probably not. The stage get-up would have blurred my memories."

She began to like him again: the oddness of it all was appealing. "Nevertheless," she said, "it is strange you should just find me to-night, for I—"

"No, it isn't," he interrupted eagerly. "I've been every night this week."

"Ah, eavesdropping again," she said, touched.

"I wanted to be absolutely sure—and then I couldn't pluck up courage to write to you."

"But you did to-night?"

"You looked so tired—I felt I wanted to protect you."

A sob came into her throat, but she managed to say coldly, "Was I very bad?"

"To one who had seen you the other nights," he said with complimentary candour.

She laughed. "How is your mother?"

"Oh, she's very well, thank you. She lives in London now."

"Then your father has retired from—"

"He is dead,—didn't you hear?"

"No." Eileen sat in shocked silence. "I am sorry," she murmured at length. But underneath this mild shock she was conscious—as they rolled on without speaking—of a new ease that had come into her life: some immense relaxation of tension. "A hunted criminal must breathe more calmly when he is caught," she thought.

XIX

"Lucky I'm in evening dress," she said, loosening her cloak as they went through a corridor, shimmering with dresses and diamonds, to a crowded supper-room.

"But you're always in evening dress, surely."

"I might have been in tights." And she had a malicious self-wounding pleasure in watching him

gasp. She hurried into a revelation of her exact position, as soon as they had secured a just-vacated little table in a window niche. She omitted only Colonel Doherty.

He listened breathlessly. "And nobody knows you are Eileen O'Keeffe, I mean Nelly O'Neill?"

She laughed. "You see *you* don't know which I am."

"It's incredible."

"So much the worse for your theories of credibility. The longer I live, the less the Show surprises me."

"What show?"

"Oh, it's too long to explain. Say Vanity Fair." Her thumb fell into its old habit of flicking the table. There was a silence.

"I am sorry you told me," he said slowly.

"Why?"

A waiter loomed over them.

"Supper, Sir Robert?"

She glanced quickly at her companion.

"Yes," he said. "*Ma buonissima!* I leave it to you. And champagne."

"*Prestissimo*, Sir Robert." He smirked himself off.

"Why does he call you that?" she asked.

"Oh, didn't you know my poor father was made a Baronet, after we entertained Royalty?"

"No; how strange your lives should have been going on all the time!" The pop of a cork at her

elbow startled her. Then she lifted her frothing glass. "Sir — to you!"

He clinked his against it. "To the lady of my dreams."

"Still?" She sipped the wine: her eyes sparkled.

"Yes; I've still a long opinion of myself."

She put out her hand quickly and pressed his an instant.

"Thank you!" he said huskily. "That was why I said I was sorry to know that to the world you were still a governess. Of course I was glad, too."

"I don't understand. I always said you were more Irish than I."

"I was glad you had kept yourself unspotted from the stage-world."

"Good God! You call that unspotted! What are men made of?"

"You were in a bad atmosphere. Your lips caught phrases."

"Nonsense. I'm a crow, not a parrot; a thoroughly sooty bird."

"It was your whiteness that attracted — your morning freshness. You don't know what vulgarity is."

"You don't know what *I* am."

"I know you to your delicious finger-tips. And that's why I am sorry you told me so much. I wanted to ask Nelly O'Neill to marry me. Now she'll think

I'm only asking Eileen O'Keeffe, the daughter of the Irish gentleman."

Her eyes filled with tears. "No, they both believe you capable of any folly. Besides, somebody would find out Nelly all the same." And a smile made a rainbow across her tears.

The arrival of the soup relaxed the tension of emotion. In mid-plate she suddenly put down her spoon and laughed softly.

"What is it?" he said, not without alarm at her transitions.

"Why, it would be one of those stock theatrical marriages, into which we entrap titles! Fascinated by a Serio-Comic, poor silly young man. She played her cards well, that Nelly. Ha! ha! ha! Who would dream of Plato's dialogues? And you talk of incredible!"

"I am content to be called silly." He tried to take her hand.

"Well, don't be it in public. You will rank with Lord Tiptleton who married Bessie Bilhook, and made a Lady of her—the only ladyhood she's ever known."

"No, I can't rank with him," he smiled back. "I'm only a Baronet."

"It sounds the same. Lady Maper!" she murmured. "But, oh, how funny! There'd be two Lady Mapers."

"My mother would be the Dowager Lady —"

"That's funnier still."

He ate in silence. Eileen mused on the picture of the Dowager, her forefinger to heaven.

"The Royalty — how did that go off?" she said, as he carved the chicken.

"With fireworks. For the reception father built a new house and furnished it with old furniture. Royalty stopped an hour and a quarter. Oh, she was wonderful. I mean my mother. Copied your phrases — see what an impression you made."

"And what have you been doing since you came into the title?"

"Looking for you."

"Nonsense!" She dropped her fork. "But you knew I had people in Ireland."

"I never knew exactly where."

"But what put you on the track of the music-halls?"

"Nothing. I never dreamed of looking for you there. I just went." Master Harold Lee Carter's phrase flashed back to her memory, "All the chaps go."

"But what about the Black Hole — I mean the works?"

"They go on," he said. "I just get the profits."

"And how about your Socialism?"

"You taught me the fallacy of it."

"I? Well, that's the cream of the joke."

"Yes. Don't laugh at me, please. When you

came into my life, or rather when you went out of it — yes, I am Irish — I saw that money and station are the mere veneer of life: the central reality is — Love."

Again her eyes filled with tears, but she remained silent.

"And I saw that I, the master, was really poorer than the majority of my serfs, with their wives and bairns."

"You are a good fellow," she murmured. "I — I meant to say," she corrected herself, "what have you done with your clothes?"

"My clothes!" he echoed vaguely, looking down at his spotless shirt-front.

"Your factory clothes! Wouldn't it be fun to wear them at supper here? Do you think they could turn you out? I don't see how, legally. Do test the question. Yes, do. Please do." And she laid her hand on his black sleeve. "I won't marry you if you don't."

"I did think you were serious to-night, Eileen," he said, disappointed.

"How could you think that, if you read the programme, as you say? 'Nelly O'Neill, Serio-Comic.' *Allons, ne faites cette tête mine de hibou.* Admit the world is entirely ridiculous and give me some more champagne." Her eyes glittered strangely.

A clock struck twelve.

"What, midnight!" she cried, starting up. "I must go."

"No, no;" he took her hand.

"Yes, yes; don't you know, at the stroke of midnight I change back to a governess."

"Well, the magic didn't work, for that clock's very slow. Sit down, please."

"You have spoken the omen. I remain Nelly O'Neill and drop Eileen for ever. *Vogue la galère.*"

"Absit omen!" He shuddered.

"Why not? What do you offer me? The love of one man. But my public loves me as one man—with a much more voluminous love—I love it in return. Why should I change?"

"Shall we say merely because the public changes? I am constant."

"Yes, you are very wonderful. . . . And if it's to-morrow already, my fate will be settled to-day. Drink to my destiny."

"I drink to our destiny," he said, raising his glass.

"No. Only to mine. It will be decided this afternoon."

"You will give me your answer this afternoon?" he cried joyfully.

"I don't say that. It's my answer I shall know this afternoon. Yours you shall have to-morrow afternoon. You don't mind giving me one day's option of your hand?"

"One day's! When you have had—"

She interrupted impatiently. "Let bygones be bygones. You shall have a letter by Monday after-

noon. But, oh, Heavens! how could we marry? You believe in nothing!"

"There's the Registrar."

She pouted: "Dry legality. No flowers, no organ, no feeling sweet and virginal in a long veil. Oh, dear! Besides, there's mother—"

"I don't object to the church ceremony."

"I'm glad. The law may end marriage. Marriage shouldn't begin with law. It ought to look beautiful at the start, at least, though one may know it's a shaky scraw."

"A shaky what?"

"Oh, it's an Irish term for a bit of black bog that looks like lovely green meadow. You step out so gaily on the glittering grass, and then squish! squash! down you go to choke in the ooze."

"Don't be so pessimistic. It would be much more sensible to think of marriage as solid meadow-land after your present scramble over a shaky what-d'ye-call it."

"True for you! I give you the stage as the shakiest of all scraws. But where *is* solid footing to be found? The world itself is only a vast bog that sucks in the generations."

"I am sorry I asked you to be serious," he said glumly. "You're such a quick-change artiste."

"I must quickly assume the governess or I'll lose my character," she said, rising resolutely.

He put her cloak tenderly round her.

"You know I'll take you without a character," he said lightly.

"If I had no character I might be tempted to take you," she retorted dispiritingly. "Thank you so much for my first supper."

XX

Eileen slept little. The dramatic possibilities of the interview with Colonel Doherty were too agitating and too numerous. This time the marionette-play needed writing. Who should receive him when he called? Eileen O'Keeffe or Nelly O'Neill?

Either possibility offered exquisite comedy.

Eileen — as plain as possible — with a high, black dress, drooped lids, stiffly brushed hair, even eye-glasses perhaps, with a deportment redolent of bread-and-butter and five-finger exercises, could perhaps disenchant him sufficiently to make him moderate his matrimonial ardour, even to hurry off apologetically to his serio-comic Circe round the corner. What a triumph of acting if she could drive him to her rival! Then as he went through the door — to loosen her hair, throw off her glasses and whistle him back to Nelly O'Neill!

The part was tempting; it bristled with opportunities. But it was also too trying. He might begin by taking lover's liberties, and the strain of repulsing him would be too great. Besides, she wasn't clear

how to play the opening of the scene. But then there was another star part open to her.

Nelly O'Neill's *rôle* was much easier: it played itself. She had only to go on with the episode. And the way the episode went on would also serve to determine finally her attitude when the moment came to throw off the mask and turn to governess. The only difficult moment would be the first—to obfuscate him immediately with the notion that he had mixed up the two addresses. Even if she failed and he realised his ghastlier blunder, it would only precipitate the dramatic duel which she must face sooner or later. All these high-strung possibilities deadened the horrible pain she knew her soul held for her, as soldiers carry wounds to be felt when the charge is over. She fell asleep near morning, her battle planned, and slept late, a sleep full of strange dreams, in one of which her drunken father counted her, and couldn't decide how many she was. "It's two I am, father asthore, only two, Eileen and Nelly," she kept crying. But he counted on.

Towards four in the afternoon she posted herself at the window. It was absolutely necessary to the comedy that she should open the door to him herself. At last a cab containing him halted at the door. She flew down, just supplanting the butler.

"How good of you, Colonel!" she cried. "But where is the Major?"

It was exquisitely calculated. She had pulled the

string and the marionette moved with precision. A daze, a flash, a stammer — all the embarrassment of a man who believes that in a day-dream he has given a second address first.

"Miss — Miss O'Neill," he stuttered, mechanically removing his hat.

"Nelly to my friends," she smiled fascinatingly. "Come in!" Christopher Sly was not more bewildered when he opened his eyes on the glories of his Court.

"What — what is this address?" he blurted, as she prisoned him by closing the door.

"Why? . . . Oh, I know. Ha! ha! ha! You've come to the Crescent instead of the Terrace."

"That confounded cabman! I'm sure I told him the Terrace."

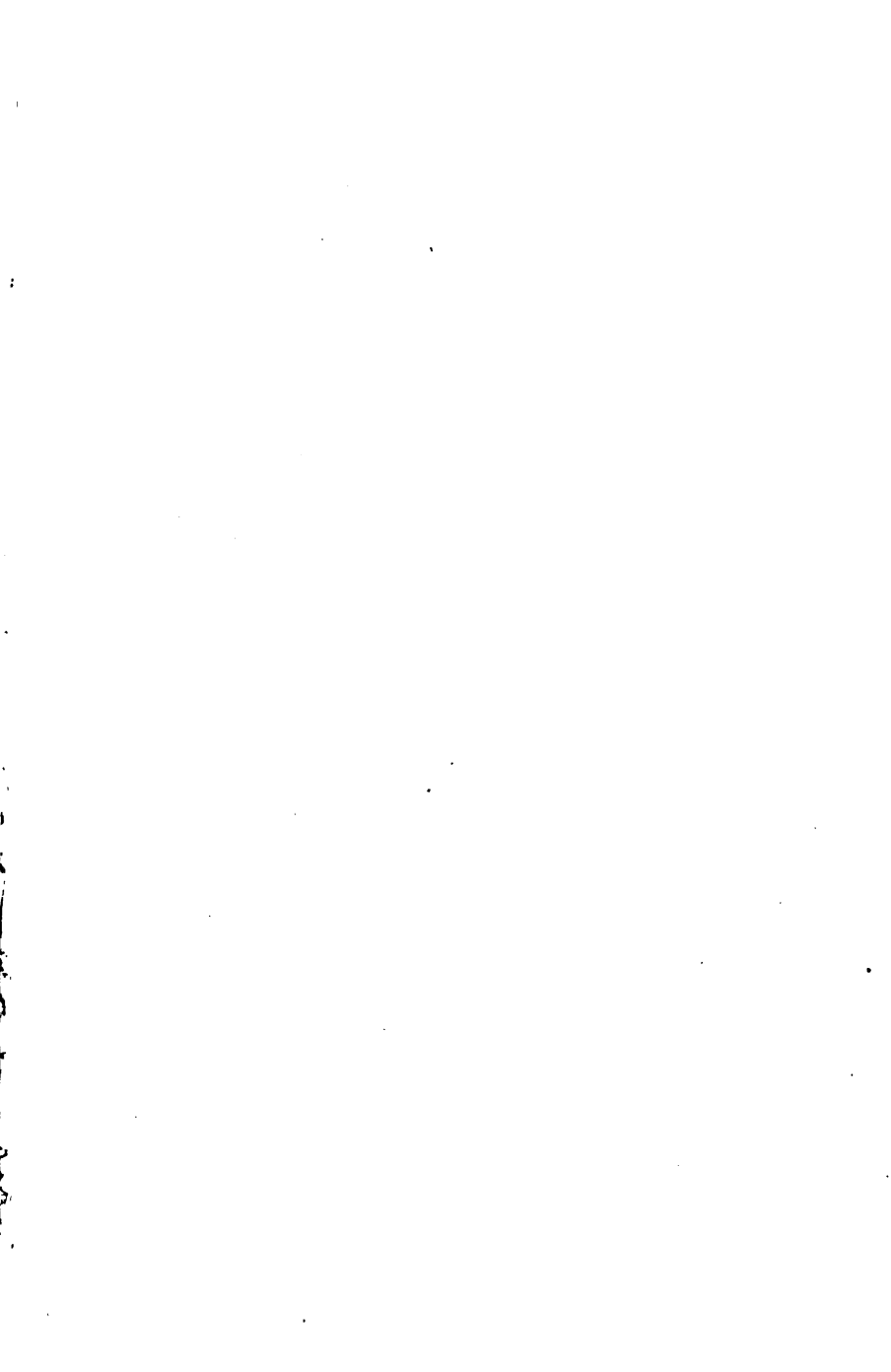
"Don't swear. He's more accustomed to the Crescent. So many pros coming home late, and all that!"

He hesitated at the foot of the stairs. "I really think I ought to call there first. . . ."

Now all the coquette in Nelly O'Neill rose to detain him, subtly tangled with the actress. She pouted adorably. "Oh, now you're here, can't you put her second for once?"

"I didn't say it was a *her*."

"A she," corrected the governess, instinctively. Nelly hastened to add, "No man leaves a woman for a man."





THE ONE THAT FASCINATED ME.

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"Cigarette"
articles o
had a

THE SERIO-COMIC GOVERNESS

before
"No, I
"Oh, I
"You want to be off with the old
you are on with the new."
thing of the kind, I assure you."
Not even the new?"
part!" He smiled and followed
you won't mind my going soon?"
the better if you talk like
open the door



VULGARITY? IT WAS YOUR WHITENESS THAT FASCINATED ME.

"This is such an old appointment," he pleaded in distress.

"I see. You want to be off with the old love before you are on with the new."

"Nothing of the kind, I assure you."

"What! Not even the new?"

"Oh, that part!" He smiled and followed her up. "You won't mind my going soon?"

"The sooner the better if you talk like that!" She threw open the door of her little sitting-room. How well the Show was going!

"A soda and whisky, Colonel? I suppose that's your idea of tea." She had the scene ready. She had got it all up like a little play, writing down the articles on a sheet of paper headed "Property List": "Cigars, cigarettes, syphons, spirits, sporting-papers," all borrowed from Master Harold Lee Carter to entertain a visitor.

But at the height of the play's prosperity, while the Colonel clinked tumblers with Nelly, came a *contretemps*, and all the farce darkened swiftly to drama as the gay landscape is overgloomed by a thundercloud.

It all came from Mrs. Lee Carter's benevolent fussiness, her interest in the man who had come to marry her governess. A servant knocked at the door, stuck her head in, and said, "Mrs. Lee Carter's compliments, and would you like some tea?"

"No, thank you," said Eileen, hurriedly.

But as the door closed, the Colonel's glass fell to the ground, and he rose to his feet. His bronzed face was working wildly.

"Mrs. Lee Carter!" he gasped. "You — you are Eileen!"

"Here's a mess," she said coolly, stooping to wipe up the carpet.

"Eileen! Explain!" he said piteously.

"It's you that ought to be explaining. I've all I can do to pick up the nasty little bits of glass."

"My brain reels. Who *are* you? What *are* you? For God's sake."

"Hush! Who are *you*? What are *you*?"

"I know what I was — your lover."

"Whose? Mine or Nelly's?"

"Good God, Eileen! You saw how anxious I was to get to you. That I was subtly drawn to Nelly is only a proof of how you were in my blood. But you're not really Nelly O'Neill. This is some stupid practical joke. Don't torture me longer."

"It tortures you that I should be Nelly O'Neill!" All the confessed sweetness of her position came up into clear consciousness: the lights, the laughter, the very smell of the smoke endeared by a thousand triumphs. How dared he speak of Nelly O'Neill as though she couldn't be touched with a pitchfork! Yes, and Bob Maper, too — her anger ricocheted to him — with his priggish notions of saving her from black bogs! And who was it that now stood over her like a fuddled accus-

ing angel? She pulled out his letter and read viciously:—

“‘A night of memories and of sighs
I consecrate to thee.’”

“I was dying to rush to you—you wouldn’t see me. And the Major dragged me—”

“Through all that mud? All those Indian escapades?”

He groaned, “And you listened—!”

“Am I not your mother-confessor?”

He seized her by the wrists. “Don’t madden me! You’re not really on the Halls? You *are* living here as governess. It is some prank, some masquerade! Say it is!” He shook her. She tried to wrest her hands away.

“Not till you tell me the truth! You haven’t been lying to me all these months?”

A sudden remembrance came to give her strength and scorn. “I *have* told you the truth, only my letter crossed you on the ocean. When it returns to England, you will see.”

His grip relaxed, he staggered back. “Come,” she said, pursuing her unforeseen advantage. “We will talk this thing over quietly. I always said you were in love with a shadow. But I find it was I who imagined a Bayard.”

“And what have I done and said worse than other men?” Again Master Harold Lee Carter’s compla-

cent sentiment came to her. Men were all alike, only their women folk didn't know.

"Worse than other men!" She laughed bitterly. "I wanted you better—all the seven heavens better—saint as well as hero, with no thought but for me, and no one before me or after me. Oh, yes, it sounds a large order, but that's what we women want. Don't speak! I know what you're going to say. Skip me. Talk of yourself."

"You get what you want. The other's only make-believe. It passes like water from a duck's back. You women don't understand. The white fire of your purity cleanses us, and that is why we will have nothing less—"

"Ah, now you have skipped *to* me. I'm not pretending there isn't an evil spirit in me to match yours. It split away from me and became Nelly O'Neill. You asked which I was? I am both. Here, I am a respectable governess. Let me ring for Mrs. Lee Carter. She'll give you my character. The white fire and all that." She pressed the bell.

"Don't be so absurd. Give me time to collect my senses."

"All right, pick up the pieces, while I collect these." She stooped over the bits of glass.

"But for Heaven's sake don't bring that woman into it—"

The door opened. "Yes, miss?"

"Another glass, please." The servant disappeared.

"I do hope you won't break this one. In what country is it that the bridegroom breaks a glass in the marriage ceremonial? Oh, yes, I remember. Fossy told me. Among the Jews. There's a lot in the profession. Not that it's such a marrying profession. And to think I might have been a regular bride! But I've lost you, my dear boy, hero of a hundred hill-fights, I *know* it—and the moment you've picked your little bits of senses together, you'll know it, too. Alas, we shall never go tiger-hunting together.

" 'A night of memories and of sighs
I consecrate to thee.' "

"I don't say I won't keep my promise," he said sulkily.

"Your promise! Hoity toity! Upon my word! I'm no breach-of-promise lady — Chops and tomato sauce indeed! I recognise that we could never marry. There would always be that between us!"

Her fascination gripped him in proportion as she let him go.

"I don't know that I should mind if nobody really knows," he began.

"You! It's I that would mind. And I really know. Could I marry a man who had told me smoking-room stories? No, Eileen is done with you. Good-by!"

"Good-by? No, I can't go. I can't face the

emptiness. You've filled me and fooled me with love all these weeks. Good God! Do you owe me nothing?"

"I leave you something — Nelly O'Neill! Go and see her. Now you're off with the old love. You mark what a prophetess I was. Nelly'll receive you very differently. No cant of superiority. You'll be just a pair of jolly good fellows. You'll sit up drinking whisky together and yarning anecdotes. No uncomfortable pretences; no black bog posing as white fire; no driven snow business, London snow nicely trodden in. And the tales of the world you tell me — how useful they'll come in for stage-patter! Oh, we shall be happy enough! We can still pick up the pieces!"

"Eileen! Eileen! you will drive me mad. What do you mean? You know I could never have a wife on the Halls. It would ruin me in the clubs, it would —"

"In the clubs! Ha! ha! ha! Every member of which would be delighted to have tea with me! But who's proposing to you a wife on the Halls? You said I owed you myself, and it's true, but you don't suppose I could *marry* a man I didn't respect? I told you we're not a marrying profession. Come, let's kiss and be friends."

He drew back as in horror. "No, no, Eileen, I respect you too much for that."

She looked at him long and curiously. "Yes, the

sexes don't understand each other. Well, good-by. I almost could marry you, after all. But I'm too wise. Please go. I have a headache and it is quite possible I shall scream. Good-by, dear. I was never more than a phantom to you — a boyish memory, and a bad one at that. Don't you know you gave me a pair of black eyes? Good-by: you'll marry a dear, sweet girl in white muslin who'll never know. God bless you."

XXI

Sir Robert Maper simply could not get up on the Monday morning. The agony of suspense was too keen, and he lay with closed eyes, trying to drowse his consciousness, and exchanging it in his fitful snatches of sleep for oppressive dreams, in one of which Eileen figured as a Lorelei, combing her locks on a rock as she sang her siren song.

But she did not prolong his agony beyond mid-day.

"MY DEAR SIR ROBERT,— Both of us are dead and gone, so, alas! neither can marry you. Don't be alarmed, we are only dead to the world, and gone to the Continent. 'Get thee to a nunnery.' Hamlet knew best. If I could have married any man it would have been you. You are the only gentleman I have ever known. But I don't love you. It's a miserable pity. I wish I did. I wonder why 'love' is an active verb in all languages. It ought to have

a passive form, like 'loquor' (though that passive should be reserved for parrots). Forgive the governess! I seem to have undergone 'love' for two men, but one was a fool and the other not quite a rogue, and I dare say I never really loved anybody but myself (and there the verb is very active)! I love to coquet, but the moment a man comes too close, I feel hunted. I dare say I was secretly pleased to find my hero tripping, so as to send him packing. Was ever hero in such a comic plight? Poor, unlucky hero! But this will be Greek to you — the kind you can't read. Oh, the men I could have married! It is curious, when you think of it, the men one little woman might marry and be dutifully absorbed in. I could have been a bass chorister's wife or a Baronet's wife, the wife of an Honourable dolt, and the wife of a dishonourable dramatist. *J'en passe et des meilleurs*. I could have lived in Calcutta or in Clerkenwell, been received in Belgravia or in Boulogne. Good Lord! the parts one woman is supposed to be fit for, while the man remains his stolid, stupid self. Talk of the variety stage! Or is it that they all want the same thing of her?

"Talking of the variety stage, there would have been the danger, too, of my thirsting for it, even with a Dowager Lady for a stepmother. The nostalgia of the boards is a disease your love might not have warded off. You are well rid of both of us.

"You said — at my first and last supper — that

money and station are the mere veneer of life, the central reality is love. That is true, if by love you read the love of God, of Christ. Do you remember my going one day over the works with your poor father? Well, after I had been through rooms and rooms of whirring machinery infinitely ingenious and diversified—that made my head ache—they took me to a shed where stood in a sort of giant peace the great engine that moved it all. ‘God!’ was my instant thought, and somehow my headache fled. And ever since then, when I have been oppressed by the complex clatter of life, my thought has gone back to that power-room, to the great simple force behind it all. I rested in the thought as a swimmer on a placid ocean. But the ocean is cold and infinite, and of late I have longed for a more human God that loved and forgave, and so I come back to the Christ. You see Plato never satisfied me. Your explanation of the B. C. glories was sown on barren soil. I grant you a nobility in your Plato as of Greek pillars, soaring in the sunlight, but somehow I want the Gothic—I long for ‘dim religious light’ and windows stained with saints. Oh, to find my soul again! If I could tell you how the Convent rises before me as a vision of blessedness—after life’s ‘shaky scraw’—the cool cloisters, the rows of innocent beds, the delicious old garden. There are tears at my heart, as I think of it. What flowers I will bring to my favourite nun. . . . God grant she is still alive! What altar-cloths I will

weave with my silver and gold ! Yes, the wages of sin shall not be death, I will pay them to the life eternal ; my dowry as the bride of Christ. I, too, shall be laid on the altar, my complex corrupt soul shall be simplified and purified, and the Holy Mother will lead me by the hand like a little child. But all this will be caviare to you. Adieu. I will pray for you.

“EILEEN.

“*P.S.* — It is a convent that trains the young, so I shall still be a Governess.”

“And perhaps still a Serio-Comic,” thought the Baronet, bitterly.

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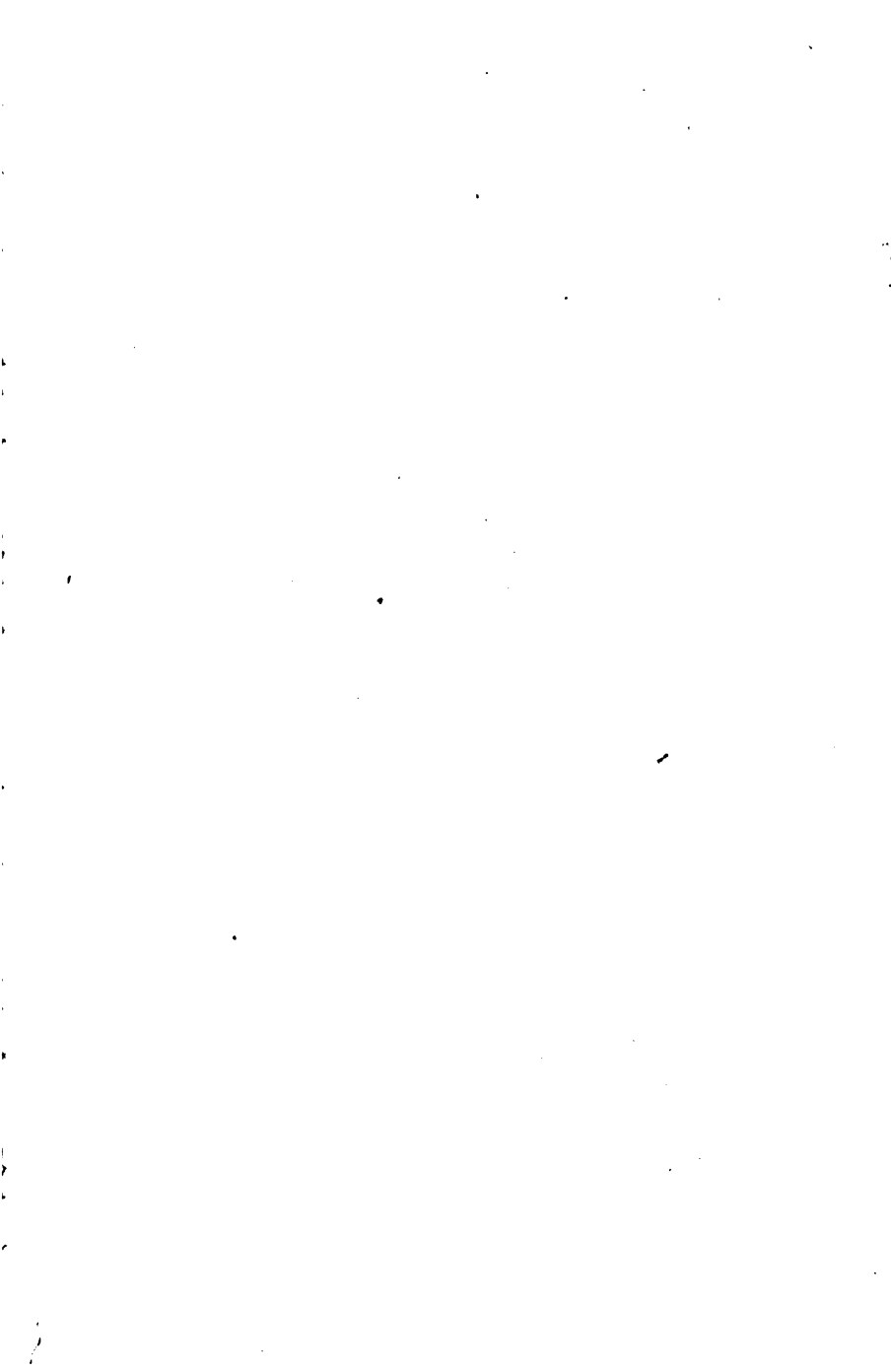
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